



CHRIST AND THE HEROES
OF
HEATHENDOM

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11



THE FURIES DEPARTING.—See p. 32.

CHRIST
AND
THE HEROES OF HEATHENDOM

BY THE

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'BIBLE ECHOES,' 'BIBLE IMAGES,' 'THE PARABLES OF JESUS,'
'RESCUERS AND RESCUED,' ETC.

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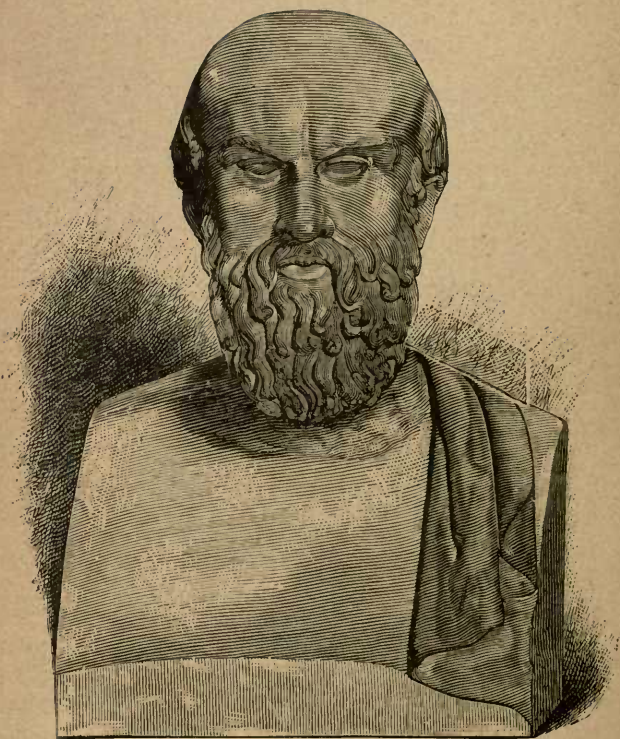
THE five chapters in this book, in their substance though not in their present form, were delivered, during five successive years, to the members of a Young Men's Literary Institute. Since college days the subject has been a bye-study and recreation with the writer amid absorbing missionary and pastoral work. His gleanings are here gathered up for readers of average intelligence. The writer has taken pains to bring his portraits of the spiritual Heroes of Heathendom into harmony with the conclusions of modern scholarship. He is naturally disposed to think that others, especially young men, may be helped by a study which broke for him the spell of non-Christian thought, and which has strengthened his own Christian convictions and desire for Christian service.

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ÆSCHYLUS.

CHRIST AND THE HEROES OF HEATHENDOM.

I.

ÆSCHYLUS THE THEOLOGIAN OF HEATHENDOM.

[The poetical quotations in this chapter are from Professor Blackie's translation of *Æschylus*. The estimate here given of the poet is in substantial agreement with the views of K. O. Müller in his *History of the Literature of Ancient Greece* (Dr. Donaldson's translation) and of Symonds in his *Studies of the Greek Poets*. Döllinger, *The Gentile and the Jew* (in the English translation), has been chiefly consulted for the portrait of the morals and manners of the age.]

BOUT twelve miles west of Athens, at the end of a crescent-shaped bay, and opposite the rocky island of Salamis, stands the small modern hamlet of Levsina, on the site of the ancient Eleusis. There, in the year 525 B.C., Æschylus was born of a noble family. Eleusis owed its existence chiefly to Demeter, or Ceres, the Patroness of Agriculture (the Earth-mother, as her name means), the full-breasted and generous nurse of men. The ruins of her temple of white marble, recently unearthed, fill the visitor with astonishment. They cover acres, and represent what was said to have been the largest temple in ancient Greece. In the fertile plain stretching northwards from the bay, Demeter, as the legend runs, first taught men to plough and sow corn.

The 'mysteries,' or religious rites at Eleusis, were among the most impressive and honoured in Heathendom. They were the real flower of the Hellenic religion, and appealed to the deeper needs of the soul. It is believed that they represented the Greek gospel of reconciliation and resurrection, probably under the symbols of the grain dying in the earth and then springing up to new life. Every year torchlight processions in honour of Demeter moved to Athens along what was hence called 'the sacred way.' These rites, slightly altered, still survive in the torchlight observances of the Greek Church on Good Friday, just as the Roman Carnival is a survival of the ancient Saturnalia, just as some modern Greeks, like their forefathers, put a small coin in the mouth of the dead to pay for his passage in the nether world. These 'mysteries' were in some respects like modern 'missions' or 'revival services,' and the initiated were the communicants of the Hellenic faith.

The whole life of the boy Æschylus was shaped by the genius and religion of his birthplace. His father, we are told, was connected with the temple of Ceres, and the boy was early initiated. It is said that when a boy he received the inspiration which made him a religious poet. It was his life-work to display the inner side of the religion which had created all the grand things around his boyhood, and given him the first raptures of an awakened mind and imagination. He also drank deeply of the spirit of that remarkable age. The Greek was then fighting his great world-historical duel with the Persian. The question to be decided was whether liberty or despotism should have Europe and the future. A few thousands of freemen then confronted two millions of Asiatic slaves. Like every other able-bodied Greek, Æschylus served as a soldier. He fought with great distinction at Marathon in 490 B.C., and at Salamis in 480 B.C. He was prouder of his success as a soldier than as a poet. This epoch-making struggle deepened the religious spirit in Greece, as the wars of Napoleon did in Germany and the Spanish Armada in England. Athens

was then the most religious city in the world, except Jerusalem. Patriotism and piety thus united to fire the soul of Æschylus. In 484 B.C., after a public contest, he was crowned as poet laureate of Greece. He afterwards retired to Sicily, where he died in 456 B.C., at his favourite city of Gela. Literary gossip said that he was killed on the sea-shore by an eagle, which, mistaking his bald head for a stone, let a tortoise fall upon it to break the shell, and so fulfilled an oracle, which declared that he was to die by a blow from heaven.

He was, if not the originator, at least the perfecter of the Greek theatre, and the real founder of tragedy; a homely word—it means a goat-song—which he ennobled by his genius. The theatre in Greece was the homestead of the Greek religion, and the poems of Æschylus were first published at a great religious festival in honour of Dionysos, or Bacchus, the wine-god. On the south-eastern slope of the Acropolis at Athens, you find to-day a theatre on the very spot where the poems of Æschylus were recited. That theatre held about thirty thousand people, and there was assembled the greatest religious gathering of the age. The old benches and sedilia are still there, with the names of the priests and other owners inscribed on them. The theatre was the sanctuary of the Greeks; their solemnities were festivities; and entertainment in the theatre was their highest act of worship. They managed to combine their diversion and their divinity. These festivals were ‘the very cream of Greek life,’ and over their feasts there never fell the shadow of a fast. The modern Parisian goes to the theatre on a Sunday evening as a relief after worship, but the Athenian went to worship at the theatre.

The tragic poet was the licensed preacher of the age, and the stage from which the author or actor recited was called the pulpit, which suggests that the modern preacher, not the modern actor, is the true successor of Æschylus. In front of the pulpit stood the altar of the god, around which the chorus moved, dancing and singing to the music of flutes.

The nearest approach among us to an ancient Greek drama is such a service of sacred song as Sabbath Schools and Bands of Hope sometimes give us. The resemblance would be almost complete if, instead of one reader of the narrative, we had three, four, or five actors reciting in theatrical style. The choir takes the place of the ancient chorus, who, with their choral hymn in strophes, antistrophes, and epodes, enlivened the narrative, and gave a musical expression to the devout ideas which it suggested.

Before the largest and most brilliant audience then on the earth, ranged on seats cut out of the sloping rock and open to the sky, and with all the appliances of the theatre, the creations of our poet were first given to the world. His aim was not to please the ear or the fancy, but to revive faith in God and increase the piety of the people, purifying their hearts by fear and pity. He completely believed in the truths he uttered. His themes were borrowed from the old mythology, which was to him a treasury of wisdom, and his impassioned earnestness, combined with the sublimity and daring of his ideas, led the ancients to believe that he was specially inspired of God. They called him 'a god-intoxicated genius.' With radiant clearness he brought forth the loftiest truths to which Heathendom had attained. He might be called the Milton of Greece, and also the greatest Puritan revival preacher of his age. He is the psalmist and theologian of the Hellenic faith. He is also the mightiest of 'the three *mighties*' of Greek poetry—the other two being Sophocles and Euripides. He is one of the world's most famous poets, and many believe that in his own department he is unequalled even by Shakspeare. Many of his ideas and phrases have been current coin among educated men for twenty-four centuries, and have laid hold of the imagination of the world. Shelley, Byron, and Swinburne are among his modern pupils, and both the Brownings are among his translators.

Of the seventy poems said to have been written by him, only seven have reached us. From these I wish to extract his creed. His poetry is the handmaid of, and his stories

the vehicles for, his theology. He gives his strength to the high and solemn things belonging to our spiritual nature. Thus he dedicated his works to Time, as feeling that the truths he taught were not for Greece or his age only, but for all mankind.

One of his poems is called *The Suppliants*. Its story is strange enough. Danaus, king of Egypt, had fifty daughters, and his brother Ægyptus had fifty sons, who wished to wed their cousins. But the sisters sternly refuse. Guided by their father and pursued by the enraged suitors, they fly for protection to Pelasgus, king of Argos. Pelasgus is in perplexity, afraid of the suitors and also of Jove, the guardian of strangers and also of the sacred rights of hospitality. Our poet is a theological disciple of Homer, whose *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were a kind of Old and New Testaments to the Greeks; but he has more than a glimpse of the divine unity, and practically speaks as a believer in one God. He refines and enriches the idea of Zeus or Jupiter, as the god of gods, the god above all gods, either quietly ignoring the other gods of Olympus, or making them the vassals of Jove. He speaks of 'the god' without further detail. God in Greek history is the chief theme in all his poems. He clothes Jupiter with nearly all the attributes which we ascribe to God. He exercises supreme authority and universal providence; he only is free; he only can give good gifts; his wrath is terrible, and whoso slights him shall in due time pay the penalty; kings reign by his high grace; he is the consummator and perfecter; he is the cause and end of all; we should honour him with unquestioning submission.

All godlike power is calm; and high
On thrones of glory seated,
Jove looks from heaven with tranquil eye,
And sees his will completed.

Our poet, in *The Suppliants*, also displays the humanity of his religion. Jupiter is the patron of the helpless strangers, who fly to him like doves from the vulture; and his ire is kindled against the man who spurns them. Justice and

mercy are the joint assessors on his throne, and preside over his ancient laws. Though chiefly occupied with the stern and the sublime, the poet has some sweet touches of humanity, as befits a son of Athens, where Pity had an honoured altar alongside of Wisdom. Though deficient in human touch, he has a fine sense of the wonder and pathos of human life, and knows how to engage our warm sympathies on behalf of woe-worn men. He paints the calamities and perversities of life in the strongest colours. Human sorrow appears to him as a bird that never for two days hath his feathers of the same colour; and life, like a piece of quilted needlework, is chequered over with sorrows. He warns us never to deem a man happy till death itself denies the hazard of reverses.

The *Prometheus Bound* is one of his last and greatest efforts, and the best known of his dramas. The names in it, says Grote, have 'become naturalised in every climate, and incorporated with every form of poetry.' Some critics count it unrivalled for sustained sublimity, and the greatest moral poem in the world. He throws remarkable vigour and strength into this work, but it does not reveal the poet's religious views, for it is a fragment, being one of a series of three poems, two of which have been lost. Taken by itself, it might mislead us as to the writer's convictions, as it has misled Shelley and Byron, who have reproduced it, and who regard Prometheus, the man of forethought, as the god-defying hero of Titanic atheism. In a style that recalls Milton, it represents the struggles of boundless ambition, and the strife between the will of Jove and the will of Prometheus. Perhaps it was this poem that led Plato to reproach our poet with impiety, as the Athenians of his day seem to have done. Another drama, it is believed, called *The Prometheus Unbound*, showed the reconciliation of these two wills.

In *The Persians*, he rehearses the proud story of the rout of the Persians in the sea-battle at Salamis, the perils and glory of which he shared. But, in spite of absorbing politics and exulting patriotism, he rises above all provincial and fugitive interests, and uses the story chiefly for the sake of

religious belief. He thus gives us a majestic and radiant illustration of one of the most deeply-rooted religious ideas of Heathendom. This is how he explains and 'improves' the overthrow of the Persians. Xerxes,¹ with green youth's presumptuous daring, enraged at the storm which delayed his passage, had treated the sacred current of the Bosphorus as if it were his slave, and had commanded it to receive three hundred lashes and a pair of fetters. He thus, foolhardy, dared to contend with Poseidon, the sea-god; he, a mortal, contending with the immortals! In Bœotia his soldiers, with godless pride, robbed the altars of the eternal gods, fired their temples, uprooted the old foundations of their shrines, and dashed down their images in commingled wreck; whereas, while laying waste the land, they should have had the gods and that which belongeth to them in reverence. But the gods will not that a mortal should have thoughts that are above the measure of a man. Such overweening conceit, blossoming, must bear a crop of woe and reap a harvest of despair, for happiness is a fruit that groweth in the garden of God only. They who thus despise the gods are god-detested, and shall perish quickly out of the way, for the impious man is the burden and reproach of earth and the eyesore of heaven. Hence, blindness of heart, that ancient curse of the gods, came upon the wicked Persians, and they were stricken of heaven with fitting vengeance.

Thus Æschylus fanned the flame of patriotic aversion to Asia, and confirmed the national faith. He never grows weary of amplifying, illustrating, and applying this solemn truth. In his *Agamemnon* he traces all the woes of Troy to the anger of Zeus against the violators of the sacred laws of hospitality. He makes his home-returning hero afraid to don purple robes, or tread on rich carpetings, lest his proud goings should be hateful to the immortal gods.

This stern view of life was in harmony with ancient history. Nearly all the great and public men of antiquity were unprincipled and haughty, and were ruined by success.

¹ Xerxes is the Pharaoh of the Greek religion.

The cup of prosperity poisoned nearly all the chief heroes of Hellenic story. All the Greek dramatists accept Æschylus' interpretation of human life and divine providence. They all teach that great success usually engenders a haughty spirit, for which they have a peculiar name, *hubris*, that is, reckless impulse, colossal self-will, or insubordination breaking out into acts of outrage: the fatal beginning of a connected course of crime which descends to the third or fourth generation. The prosperous man, battenning on rude wealth, swollen with insolence, shows a more than mortal arrogance. The gods are concerned in humbling him, and set vengeance on his track, and then he is even as a hare that is dogged to death. 'Insolence over-glutted,' says Sophocles, 'having surmounted the topmost precipice, dasheth into ruin, where she useth her feet in vain.' When the lusty sinner has glutted his soul with sin's fatness, he soon grows curse-intoxicated. A mist, engendered of crime, danceth before his eyes, and his dementation is the beginning of his doom. Evil appears good to him, and he is given over to a reprobate mind. Then his sowing is madness, and the harvest death. For Zeus is the chastener of swelling thoughts, and reckoneth strictly with the proud of heart. Against them he bends his bow and makes it ready; and lo, the arrow speeds to the mark; but he showeth favour unto such as be humble. The Greek dramatists are ever telling us that the gods cannot abide the wilfulness of pride. When the godless man's cup of sin is full, a thunderbolt leaps out of the blue sky and lays him low. The light rejected retires behind the cloud of doom, from which it descends as lightning. The despiser of God drives furiously in the race, heeding not the limits of the course, and dasheth the wheel against a stone, so that the up-turned chariot of his prosperity is broken in pieces. His proud barque careers before the wind, but the god-sent storm descends without warning. The sky over him grows black with the lowering curse of the offended deity, and the burdened cloud bursts in a shower of black ruin. Trouble fills his sails and breaks the yard-arms on the masts. Unable to double the

promontory of sorrow, he hears the roar of the breakers on the dead lee-shore, and is dashed on the rock of justice, and dies unwept and unseen, and the sunlight glistens on the upturned keel. 'Make every man thy foe, but fear the gods,' is the motto of Æschylus. His poems teem with warnings against pride, which go far to disprove the oft-repeated saying that the Greeks despised humility as mean-spiritedness. He counsels us never to utter a prideful word against the gods, nor to assume aught of vanity, if one excel another in valour or plenteous wealth, for the gods love the modest, but abhor the wicked. Often, in the tone of an Old Testament prophet, he expresses his horror of the ungodly man—

Who spurns great Justice' altar dread
With damned defiance,
Him the deep hell shall claim, and shame
His vain reliance.

In perfect keeping with the genius of Greek culture—

The Naught in overplus, thy race's badge,

the burden of his appeals is, to have 'nothing in excess,' 'not to neglect the mean,' to study the just middle, the right proportion, and the becoming. He bids us practise moderation and modesty, voyage with lowered sail, and curb with tight reins elation and despair. He commends contentment linked with discretion, and a lot midway between his that taketh a city and his that is led into captivity. He is an apostle of 'sweet reasonableness.' Blest is the man, he says beautifully, in whose heart reigneth holy fear, and a sober mind is the best gift of God. He thoroughly understands the subtle mighty laws of stable prosperity, which are easily forgotten by the newly rich and other favourites of Fortune. He counsels the prosperous to hasten slowly if they would win life's subtle game.

Mark my word, I tell thee truly,
Pride that lifts itself unduly
Had a godless heart for sire.
Healthy-minded moderation
Wins the wealthy consummation,
Every heart's desire.

We must confess, however, that some clay mingled with the fine gold of his natural theology. All the Greeks had a limited and wavering idea of the divine goodness. It was an axiom with them that 'the gods hate the prosperous,' and they fully believed their strange proverb, that in the game for the stake of life played between God and man, 'the dice of God are loaded.' The jealousy they ascribed to God was mean, and had nothing in common with the jealousy of Jehovah, which is only the anger of injured, insulted love. Æschylus was not emancipated from the idea that the gods cast envious glances at the happiness of mortals, and that the most favoured of men should propitiate the Nemesis of fortune, and fling into the greedy sea a part to save the whole. I rather think that he would have endorsed the advice which Amasis gave to Polycrates when his cup was full to the brim.

So, would'st thou 'scape the coming ill—
Implore the dread Invisible

Thy sweets themselves to sour!
Well ends his life, believe me, never,
On whom, with hands thus full for ever,
The gods their bounty shower.

And if thy prayer the gods can gain not,
This counsel of thy friend disdain not,
Invoke Adversity!

And what of all thy worldly gear
Thy deepest heart esteems most dear,
Cast into yonder sea!

The stories or 'arguments' in his four remaining poems carry us back to the mythical ages. Laius, king of Thebes, was guilty of a great crime, which drew upon him the curse of his victim. The Oracle counselled him to live childless, else his seed would work his and his country's woe. He despised the warning, and his wife gave birth to a son. He then exposed the child on the mountains, that it might be devoured by wild beasts. The babe's feet were injured by the cold, and also by the cords which bound it. Hence he was called Œdipus, that is, Swollen-foot, or Swell-foot. He

was saved, and having grown to manhood was warned that he should slay his own father. Fleeing, as he thought, from such a destiny, he unwittingly rushed upon it. Insulted by a charioteer, he slew both him and his master, thus fulfilling the Oracle, for the master was his own father. He travelled on to Thebes, which was then devastated by the Sphinx, a noisome monster, having the face of a fair woman, the claws of a lion, and the wings of a vulture. The throne of Thebes and the hand of Queen Jocasta were offered to him who should rid the land of the pest. Œdipus, ready of wit, solved the Sphinx's riddle, and in ignorance married his own mother. By-and-by he discovered that he was both the son and husband of Jocasta, and in grief tore out his own eyes. His two sons behaved very cruelly to him. He cursed them, declaring that in punishment of their undutifulness they should divide the land with steel. To avoid that doom they agreed to reign in Thebes each alternate year. But at the end of his year Eteocles would not give up the throne to Polynices, who, gaining aid from Argive chiefs, marched against Thebes. The brothers fought in single combat, and both were slain.

The three other poems are called *The Agamemnon*, *The Libation-bearers*, and *The Gracious-minded*. They form really one poem, or a trilogy, as it is called. The forlorn story in them supplied the chief staple and the *ne-plus-ultra* of tragedy for centuries. It bears the stamp of a war-wasted, blood-drenched age. King Pelops slays his groom, and the shed blood cries to heaven against him. His two sons, Atreus and Thyestes, become bloody men like their father. Atreus, pretending to be reconciled to Thyestes, who had shamefully wronged him, sets before him a feast which horrified the Sun. The uncle slew his own nephews and offered their cooked flesh to their own father. A deadly feud arises between the two families.

Agamemnon, son of Atreus, prince of men, and admiral of the Greek fleet, is absent at Troy, and Ægisthus, son of Thyestes, wins the affection of Clytemnestra, wife of

Agamemnon, who, returning from the wars, is slain by his own wife. His blood cries from the ground, and God forgets not the shedders of it. Orestes, son of Agamemnon, come to man's estate, avenges the murder of his father by slaying Clytemnestra and Ægisthus, and the Furies of his mother begin to torture him.

These three poems were written in advanced life, and store up the harvest of his ripest thoughts. He shows great originality and daring. To use his own illustration, he is not like a fledgling leaving the warm nest with fear, but like a full-grown eagle swooping from his eyrie in wide curves. He plainly values the story chiefly for the thought in it. No previous heathen writer known to us has so boldly grappled with the greatest world-problems of conscience, and such is the penetration of his genius that no writer of his class has yet excelled him, not even Shakspeare in *Macbeth* or *Hamlet*. In these three tragedies we have the masterpiece of his mind, the confession of his faith, the fullest statement of his theology, and, according to Müller, the richest treasure of Greek poetry after the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. These three poems have thus unique attractions for the student of conscience and comparative religion.

The creed of Æschylus embraces four Articles of Faith which fill him with awe: Moral Heredity, Conscience, Retribution, and Reconciliation.

1. **Moral Heredity.**—This principle is fully illustrated in the histories of the two royal families of Thebes and Argos or Mykenæ, which furnish the persons of his drama. An 'evil genius' cleaves to the two races, and hands down the curse from age to age. The iniquities of the fathers are visited upon the children to the third and fourth generations. He teaches that 'crime never dies without posterity,' and that the nature of sin is all but indelible and self-perpetuating. Every evil deed becomes the seed of a new evil. Wickedness is the mother of many children, each of whom is like unto herself. The paternal sin is a 'bud of bitterness and blood,' and Orestes and

Œdipus are the victims of the sins of their sires. Hence the transmitted curse and the never-departing sword. The whole land of Thebes was polluted with the curse of the sin of one man, and so the pestilence, 'that unarmed Mars,' desolated it, for the sinner is not permitted to perish alone in his iniquity. He emphasises as a fact the solidarity of families and clans nearly as much as the Apostle Paul emphasises the solidarity of the race in relation to Adam. He even speaks of a 'primal curse,' and comes very near the idea of original sin—a sort of 'Adam's taint and woe,' derived from the Titanic men of the early ages, and showing itself in a universal rebellious inclination against the gods. He makes Cassandra speak of the 'prime offence of this crime-burthened race.' He is quite familiar with what is called in modern phrase corporate evil, the collectivity or continuousness of man, and race-unity and totality of life. He too has brooded over the fact that the innocent suffer with the guilty, and the mysteries of related life. He thus recognises that biological law or generalised fact of social science which our biologists call heredity, and which is taught as an article of faith in the Old Testament.¹ He has no clear idea, however, of 'the entail of curses cut off' by the character of the individual. Ethical forces often seem to him to be overwhelmed by the hereditary. And yet he teaches that men serve themselves heirs to the sins of their sires, and that the hereditary curse is endorsed and strengthened by the sin of the individual, and that the doer of the deed must suffer. Here are some of his crystallised utterances—

I know
That impious deeds conspire
To beget an offspring of impious deeds
Too like their ugly sire.
From time to time
In children's children recurrent appears
The ancestral crime
And the recreant son plunges guiltily on,
To perfect the guilt of his sires.

¹ Jackson's *Doctrine of Retribution*, 3rd Edition, pp. 19, 172.

But this stern theology does not shake his faith in God, nor make a theodicy impossible for him. Like every deep theological thinker, he faces the fact of evil, without being too careful to narrow its limits, and he still believes that divine justice, in despite of evil men, wisely guides all things to an issue of right.

2. Conscience.—Æschylus is the greatest interpreter of conscience in Heathendom. He worships conscience with the consent of all that is within him, and unfolds both its right and might. The other Greek poets, however, do not ignore this great theme, for to the question, What disease is killing you? Euripides makes a matricide reply: 'Conscience, for I am conscious that I have done evil.' This age is distinguished, we are told, by the earnest study of conscience, not only by theologians and moral philosophers, but also by novelists. Dorner thus sums up the results of these studies: 'We now know not only that man has conscience, but that conscience has man.' Our poet sets forth that truth with wonderful impressiveness. He knows right well that conscience is constitutional and organic, and in the fundamental nature of the soul.

It is conscience that gives their superhuman grandeur to his characters. He sees clearly that conscience is the true sublime of human life, and that it makes man man. He discovers nothing great in man but what is moral. He dives down into the inward parts of our nature, and brings forth ideas which are agreeable to the instincts of catholic humanity. He thus appeals to Briton and Greek alike. Only the dress is antique, and that adds a rare literary charm. Our fancy is touched and entertained by the contrast between the modernness of the truth and the antiquity of its garb. Hence the student of conscience can shake hands with Æschylus across the centuries.

Orestes stands forth as the embodiment of moral truths. He is the Hamlet of Greece. Sophocles and Euripides nearly complete the likeness by making him mad. With Æschylus he is driven to the verge of madness. According to the moral

ideas of his age, he must, both as son and prince, avenge the murder of his father. Personal revenge was then the only shield against crime. He feels himself under law and obligation. Responsibilities from which there is no escape cleave to him. In him we see a faithful portrait of a conscience rent by conflicting motives. But conscience asserts its superiority over all sophistries about destiny, fate, a supreme spell, or an impulse from the gods. Dashing young Greek prince though he be, conscience is mightier in Orestes than all else, and shapes his life. As the avenger of his father he slays his mother, and conscience protests. The Furies at once are upon him.

The vivifying genius of our poet gave the Furies that form by which they are now known among men. This is one of those Greek myths which have passed into ordinary speech, and have swayed the imaginations and minds of men by reason of the eternal truths so beautifully wrapped up in them, for they are emblems not enigmas. They are

Jewels

That on the stretched forefinger of all time
Sparkle for ever.

The Greek loved to turn folk-lore into a myth, and dogma into a symbol. He also gave scope to his god-making genius. The Furies are marriageless women, more frightful to behold than gorgons or harpies. For hair they have twisted snakes, and their hands grasp thongs of knotted snakes. They carry dusky, glowing torches. They are dog-visaged, black-skinned, black-mantled, and girt with a crimson sash. Their eyes distil beads of poison, and fell poison drips from their wrathful breasts. Men tremble to name these dread deities, and by a propitiatory compliment they are called, as by our poet, 'the gracious-minded.' They are keen-scented hell-hounds that track the villain till they overtake him. From them is no escape. Even in sleep they make the heart throb with the memory of sin. One thus speaks for all—

Go where he will,
A blood-guilty ranger,
Hotly will hound him still,
I, the Avenger.

The doom of the impious is their delight, and they pursue him into the other world. The Furies are most real to the intense and glowing mind of Æschylus. He made them very real to his hearers too, for they sprang up in terror, as if the Furies were actually upon them, when his poems were first recited in the theatre. As conscience is one of his foundation truths, the Furies are the chief movers in his trilogy. To him they represented stern facts, as they did to Byron when he wrote—

My solitude is solitude no more,
But peopled with the Furies.

The Furies are the heaven-sent avengers of sin, and the personified terrors of an accusing conscience. They held up a mirror before Orestes, in which he saw his murdered mother; a fine ethical touch, for the supreme punishment of sin, in addition to the sense of God's righteous condemnation, is to '*receive the things done in the body.*' They are the venerable children of the gods, and represent penal justice and the curses of the injured, and are closely related to Fate and Nemesis. They are sisters, as having the same parentage, and they are many (though sometimes only three are mentioned), their number probably betokening the multitude of self-reproaches. They are sometimes called '*The Curses,*' because, if not created, they are at least roused to activity by the cry of the injured to heaven for redress. They speak as if deputed by mankind. '*O thou fell Fury of my father's curse!*' exclaims Eteocles, as the net of his destiny closes around him. The shade of Clytemnestra, with the deadly gash on her neck, urges the sleeping Furies, as her allies, to torment Orestes. The priest gagged Iphigenia's mouth, lest she should breathe a curse on Argos, for men dreaded the righteous cry for vengeance on the wrong-doer. All antiquity believed that the curses of parents on undutiful children were fearfully fulfilled.

The Furies also symbolise more than the scourges of remorse, for they are spiritual forces acting from without a man. Most awful is their wrath, and it easily masters the bravest

and strongest of men. They have no terrors for the innocent, but they drive forth the guilty, binding his heart with a viewless chain, blighting his brain, burning his marrow, and giving him drops of torturing recollection even in his sleep.

3. **Retribution.**—Conscience and the Furies do not exhaust our poet's conception of retribution, for he finds it in the decrees of heaven and the constitution of the world. Traces of a dark, all-embracing fatalism often appear in his poems. He is a pupil of Homer, with whom man is often the plaything of friendly or hostile gods, who are guided by their caprices or their crimes. In that lawless age, the perplexities of Providence, always great, were greater than under governments like our own. But his keen moral instincts and rare genius hold fast to the moral view of the world, in spite of all opposing facts, fancies, and errors. Nemesis, or Retribution, is for him an eternal certainty at the core of the world, and it gives their unity and vigour to all his poems. Though the sinful are at first suffered to sin with impunity, it is always followed by the fatal punishment of retribution. He illustrates this truth on a grand scale in *The Persians*.

Euripides often, as in his *Medea*, shocks us by confounding all moral distinctions, but our poet never does so. He identifies the Fates and the Furies. It is man's crime that arms Fate's avenging hand. He recognises the self-avenging power of sin, and finds Justice at work everywhere among the affairs of men. He that does ill, fares ill. Vengeance alighteth upon all; to some in the morning quickly, to others at noon, and to others in the dark midnight. He believes that punishment is born at the same time with sin. Not Fate, but Justice, is the sinner's foe. Men are their own worst enemies, and sin to their own undoing. Fate is in the service of offended Justice.

Whoso, with no forced endeavour,
Sin-eschewing liveth,
Him to hopeless ruin never
Jove the Saviour giveth.

And again—

Not the gods, thy proper folly
Is the parent of thy woes.
Jove hath laid no trap to snare thee,
But the 'scapeless net of ruin
Thou hast woven for thyself.

To him life is full of dramatic situations, because sin is always begetting tragedies. He believes in a power which is always striving to make odds even. Fury cries Havoc, but Havoc only pursues the tainted track of blood. Ruin's storm raves over guilty hearths. The unblest fruit of woe is reaped by the man who sowed in transgression's fields. The smoke rising from a brother's blood gathers into a cloud which darkens the days of the murderer, and at last casts down the lightnings of vengeance upon his head. The godless man ever goes from bad to worse, and with the worst ends. His inmost soul trembles before the terrors of divine justice. 'He has an almost Jewish ideal of offended Holiness,' says Symonds. No abused revelation of mercy weakens his faith in moral laws; and thus many of our Bible-readers have a far fainter conception of retribution than he has.

We specify three of the chief features of his teaching about retribution.

(1) *He connects it with the Deity.* He teaches the Nemesis not of an invincible law, but of an offended god. Jove holds the scales even-handed, and is the Avenger who sinks the sinner low; and Justice is the daughter of Jove. He is at pains to show that his creations are in harmony with the laws of heaven as declared by the Oracle at Delphi. He believes that Heaven and Earth, and avenging time, are the ministers of retribution, and that the Divinity presiding over this law is great and never groweth old.

(2) *He also teaches that retribution is sanctioned by man's reason and conscience.* Every one in his tragedies who has suffered wrong confidently consoles himself with the certainty of retribution, and predicts that punishment shall overtake the wrong-doer; and the prediction is sooner or later ful-

filled. The old Herald in Argos declares that Troy's penalty is equal to its crime, and he but expresses the universal feeling in Argos. In this matter the voice of the people is the voice of God, and Æschylus is only interpreting the conviction of his age and of all ages.

(3) *He firmly believes, as the Psalmist does, in what is called 'poetical justice,' or 'tragic irony.'* Retribution in his poems is exact and ironical. Each gets back exactly his own both in kind and degree, and often with an artistic completeness. He discovers an artistic fitness in retribution which gratifies his Greek perception of propriety and harmony. It is measure for measure, and like for like. The penalty so recalls the sin as to mock the sinner. He rejoices to trace the likeness between the sin and its punishment. This idea is amplified with all the aids of antithesis. Wretches are brought to a wretched doom. The law is stroke for stroke, harm repaid with harm, and murder responsive to murder. Old wrong must pay the penalty in full to young right.

We die by guile as guilefully we slew,
exclaims Clytemnestra as she receives the death-dealing blow.
Orestes pleads that he is but making the score clean.

By most righteous doom,
Who drugged the cup with curses to the brim
Himself hath drunk damnation to the dregs.

And this law pursues men even into the unseen world, for there another Jove holds final judgment on the guilty shades, and the guilty inherit woe even as their guilt deserves.

'Tis robber robb'd, and slayer slain ; for, though
Ofttimes it lag, with measured blow for blow,
Vengeance prevaieth
While great Jove lives.

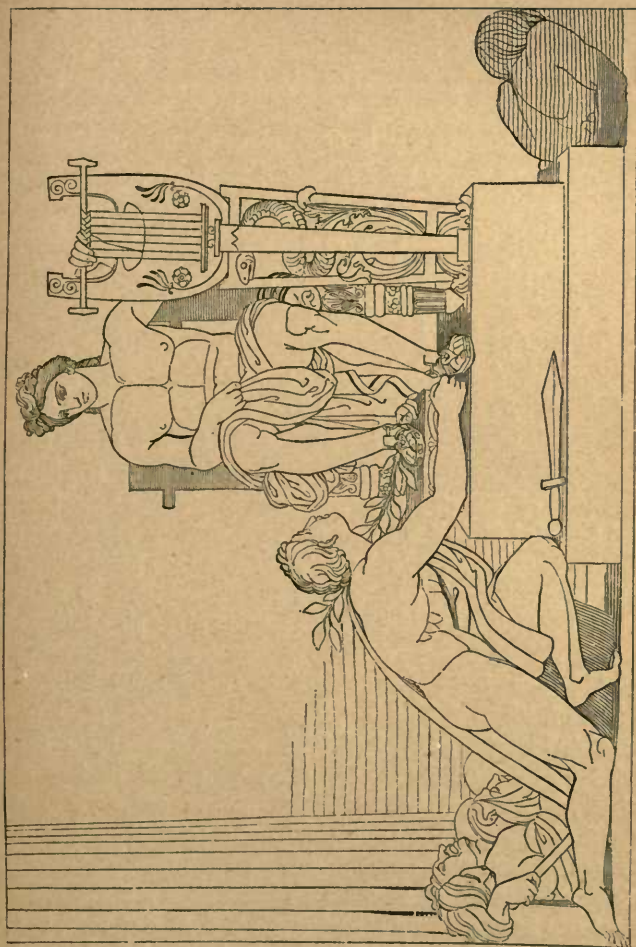
Clytemnestra is slain by her son's hand on the very spot where she slew Agamemnon, and slain (as Euripides would have it) by the same axe with which she slew, and we almost expect to be told that the old blood-stains on the axe are just covered by the fresh ones. Clytemnestra and Ægisthus

are comrades in woe as in guilt. Their corpses are laid side by side on the very theatre of their misdeeds, and the poet thus sums up the moral—

*Blood for blood, and blow for blow,
Thou shalt reap as thou dost sow:
Age to age with hoary wisdom
Speaketh thus to men.*

4. **Atonement and Reconciliation.**—He rounds his theology into completeness by his teaching about Atonement and Reconciliation. Having built up, according to his light, the human and the divine sides of truth, he essays to complete the arch by putting in the keystone. The typical Greek had no real sense of sin. Heathenism practically knew nothing of sin except in connection with the outward rites of religion. Our poet has clearer ideas of sin and guilt than Socrates and Plato had, but still he connects them chiefly with unnatural crimes. Guilt with him does not cover a much wider area than blood-guiltiness, except in extreme cases of impiety, undutifulness towards parents, and breaches of hospitality. He could carry his hearers along with him by imputing deep guilt to blood-stained men only. The Furies appear as the avengers of kindred blood only: they do not punish Clytemnestra for the murder of Agamemnon (the two were united by marriage only); but they punish Orestes for the murder of his mother. *Sang oblige*. The Furies do not regard the degree of guilt, else they would have tortured Clytemnestra more than Orestes.

Like all heathen writers, our poet does not clearly distinguish between sin and crime, nor has he any conception of the spirituality and universality of moral law. He does not brand with guilt the evil motives and wishes which do not proceed to action. It has been truly said that crime and criminal belong to every language; but that sin and sinner belong to the Christian vocabulary only. Æschylus does not hold, as some of our scientific men do, that sin cannot be forgiven and that the past is irreparable. Even in his gloomy theology he finds place for pardon.



ORESTES SUPPLIANT TO APOLLO.

Consider his Orestes. No sooner has he slain his mother, than the Furies are upon him, and their terrors drink up his spirit. In his agony he seeks divine guidance. He flies along the shores of the Corinthian Gulf to a deep retired glen in the Alps of Greece, on the south-western slope of Parnassus. In that natural sanctuary he finds the radiant temple and far-famed oracle of Apollo. It was to Greeks what Jerusalem was to the Jews, what Rome is to Romanists, the grand confessional of sin-burdened souls, the metropolitan see of Heathendom, the prophetic centre of the earth, where God spoke to men. This reverence for oracles is a curious and beautiful remnant of the early piety of the world. Now watch Orestes. He first bathes in the hallowed fountain of Castalia hard by the temple. The traveller still finds there a great square bath cut in the rock, and shattered by earthquakes, which once held the sacred waters of purification. Here is the idea of washing away sin. Orestes grasps the knees of the sacred statue of Apollo, and with frankest confession of his sin, implores counsel. The Furies that have hounded him all the way from Argos sleep on the altar steps while Orestes prays: an exquisitely fine touch—respite from the clamours of an accusing conscience there is none but at heaven's altar. The divine voice gives glad tidings, bidding the blood-stained man not to despair. Apollo's priestess counsels him to go to Athens and crave the protection of the Virgin Athene, radiant daughter of Jove, purest and most majestic of the deities, representative of the divine wisdom, and the inspirer of men. Orestes hastens to Athens, dogged again by the Furies. Athene advises him to submit his case to the Areopagites, who form the supreme tribunal of heaven on earth.

The solemnities of divine law, immutable morality, and conscience have sunk into the deepest soul of our poet, and he feels that all the claims of these must be satisfied before sin can be rightly pardoned. The Furies, in the name of retributive justice, plead that he should be given up to them. But Athene and Apollo appear, the guiltless for the guilty.

Apollo is the best-beloved of the gods, the favourite son of Jove, the god of light, 'the way-god and leader,' the great prophet who reveals to mankind the will of his Heavenly Father. Jupiter (*zeu pater*) means 'God (our) Father.' He is also called *zeu soter*, the Saviour God. Apollo seldom sends the seeker away unsatisfied. He is also the god of help and healing, and one of his names is 'the great physician.' Apollo, as a divine mediator and advocate, identifies himself with the contrite Orestes. He promises to champion, help and save the suppliant.¹ The sacred judges give their decision by casting each a pebble into the brazen urn of condemnation or the wooden urn of acquittal. The votes are equal, but Athene saves him by her casting vote. He is scarcely saved. But he must be cleansed by blood and water. For there is no hope for him while unatoned. Mere time, that smooths all other things, cannot of itself smooth the front of his offence, nor can his tears wash the ensanguined stain to a milder hue. All the rivers in the world will not wash away blood. In his own way he must believe 'that without shedding of blood is no remission.' The blood of sacrificial beasts is duly shed and sprinkled upon him, and he steps forth a forgiven and purified man, in harmony with the gods and his own conscience, for he has received a pardon sanctioned by divine law.

Loosed from his guilt, and all the fierce voices of self-accusation hushed within, he now walks at liberty in the land of the living. Even the Furies, representatives of sternest justice, acquiesce. Not only do they cease from troubling, but, taking up their abode on the very spot where the case was tried, they are sistered with Athene, representative of divine wisdom, receive divine honours, and pour blessings on the land. So at last justice and mercy meet

¹ Some Germans think that the triad of Zeus, Athene, and Apollo bears an unmistakable analogy to the Christian Trinity, and Mr. Gladstone finds in Apollo the legendary anticipations of Christ. (Rawlinson's *The Religions of the Ancient World*, pp. 213, 214.)

together and embrace each other.¹ Thus the theologian masters the tragedian, for, contrary to the fashion of tragedies, all comes to a happy close. Conscience is the 'argument' of the dramas, and instead of a catastrophe we have a complete reconciliation. All wounds are healed, the broken harmony is restored, and the scene is bathed in an atmosphere of peace. Reconciliation is the one harmonious echo in man's discordant life.

The poet shows us by this most interesting living illustration the inner side of the great Greek system of expiation and purification. He is rich in phrases which are in some respects Bible-like. The chorus says to Orestes—

There is atonement. Touch but Loxias' altar,
And he from bloody stain shall wash thee clean.

Orestes speaks of having his filthy stains purged away, and of being cleansed from guiltiness by blood. He says—

The blood of beasts hath sprent me.
The lucent lymph hath purged the filthy stain.

We come upon even some faint presentiments of the guiltless suffering for the guilty. Heracles, the son of Zeus and of a woman, appears as a mediator in *Prometheus*, and he was usually regarded by the Greeks as a saviour and the redresser of wrongs. He says (*Prometheus*, v. 1026), 'Hope not for an end to such oppression until a god appear as thy substitute in torment, ready to descend for thee into the sunless realms of Hades, and the dark abyss of Tartarus.' And Sophocles, in his *Œdipus in Colonos* (v. 498), says, 'For one soul, I think, would suffice to effect this, even for thousands, if it approach with a pure mind.'²

Such is the Hellenic gospel of Reconciliation according to

¹ See the Frontispiece taken from Flaxman, which clearly presents to the eye our poet's gospel of reconciliation. Orestes at last stands acquitted, protected on the one side by the Areopagites, the representatives of divine justice, and on the other side by Minerva and Apollo, the representatives of divine wisdom and mercy. Even the Furies are reconciled to him.

² Luthardt, *Saving Truths*, p. 322.

Æschylus. It is profoundly interesting to the student who wishes to understand 'the correspondence of the gospel with the moral nature of man,'¹ or the adaptation of the Christian faith to the deepest needs of the human conscience. Neither Shakspeare nor Victor Hugo in his *Les Misérables* gives a more impressive delineation of the terrors of conscience. In his *Orestes*, conscience is both a judicial and a regal faculty. The inner judge is also a resistless king. No doubt the Greek poet does justice to the depth rather than to the breadth of his subject. Still, conscience was to him the central fact in man, and the horizon where he found the meeting-point of earth and heaven. The need of atonement was suggested to him by the deep-felt disunion which conscience reveals in our nature. The law of retribution revealed in us, led him to anticipate a spiritual law, bringing freedom from a sphere of nature above us. He hoped to find in the soul both the labyrinth and the clue.² He brooded over man's moral needs, and, as he believed in God, he felt sure that they must be met somehow. He made the most of every hint of reconciliation which he received from tradition and his own inner lights, while his ideas ripened into certainty by his constant and intense meditation upon them. Thus he constructed his gospel creed.

The oldest testament or revelation of God is that written on the tablets of the human heart. Compare the New Testament with that oldest testament as unfolded by Æschylus, and you discover many exact and surprising coincidences. The old-world poet gives an outline of a sinful man's needs and yearnings; and does not Christ plainly fill up the whole outline with truth and reality?

We have considered the noblest attainments and aspirations of Æschylus, but, to tell the whole truth, we have extracted only the pure gold from the base alloy with which it is mingled. Mr. Gladstone, in his *Studies on Homer*, by a generous eclecticism, presents the good elements in Homer's theology, but Mr.

¹ *The Boyle Lectures* for 1874 and 1875. Henry Wace, M.A.

² Jackson's *Retribution*, p. 350.

Mahaffy, in his *Social Life in Greece*, reveals the darker side ; and his reading of Homer is justified by fact. Up to this point we have treated our poet as Mr. Gladstone treats Homer ; we have tried to collect all the truth which a modern might find in his statements or suggestions. But his whole theology is like the image of gold and clay in Daniel's vision ; it might easily be smitten to pieces by the stone of criticism. The great ideas brought before us are not grasped by the poet in their purity, completeness, and exclusiveness. These rays of light struggle feebly with the darkness which ever and anon swallows them up. The best parts of his theology are like a newly-found statue not yet disengaged from the soil, or like the half-hewn obelisks which the traveller finds in the quarries of Syene, still united to the parent rock.

In an age of new-born democracy and sceptical criticism, Æschylus stood forth as a firm believer in the theology of Homer ; but Olympus, as pictured by Homer, was 'a city of gods more immoral, more faithless, more depraved than the world of men.' There was no Satan among them, but there was a great deal of Satan in almost every one of them. By habit and repute many of these blessed gods were worse than the worst of men. Zeus himself was a rebellious son, a faithless husband, and sometimes a cruel father. Euripides, with a wicked joy, like a graceless freethinker, parades all these mythological enormities. The stream of mythology was turbid with scandal, and our Greek tries to filter it that he may slake therewith the thirst of the thoughtful men of his day. He quietly drops off the immoral parts, spiritualises, beautifully applies superstition to truth, extracts principles out of old-world myths, seeks a soul of truth in things false, and builds a rational and moral piety upon imaginative and ever-changing traditions, which, Proteus-like, refused to be caught in any definite shape. He thus strove to keep the sinking creed above water. Döllinger¹ proves that the religious rites his genius commended to the Greeks were

¹ See his *Gentile and Jew*, vol. i., especially his chapters on the Mysteries.

saturated with shameful immoralities, that moral purity of soul was unknown to Heathendom, and that their purifications were mechanical, physical, and magical, and that they were not even types of a pure conscience. His poems were written for the festivals of Dionysos, who was one of the most immoral of the gods of Greece.

Then many of the highest authorities regard him as an out-and-out fatalist. Sometimes he speaks as if even Jove were helpless under supreme Fate, agreeing with Euripides—

E'en God within the dented groove
Of Fate's resolve Himself must move.

Lecky calls him 'the great poet of fatalism,' and Schlegel makes 'the prevailing idea' (in his poems) 'an oppressive fate, against which the will of man dashes itself blindly in vain,' though Symonds holds that not Fate, but Nemesis, is the ruling idea. His belief in God wrestles with his belief in blind chance, and seems in the end to prevail, though with difficulty. In spite of such errors and vices, by his wonderful genius and noble moral instinct, he collects all the fugitive good elements in Greek theology and weaves them into a tolerably consistent system.

Æschylus, the theologian of Heathendom, and Paul, the theologian of Christendom, are both connected with Mars' Hill at Athens, the chief scene of the great tragedy of the poet, and the very spot where the Apostle preached to the Athenians (Acts xvii.). The relation between these two theologies is suggested by Dionysius the Areopagite, one of the Apostle's hearers. Both the name and office of Dionysius recall Æschylus.

Dionysius was named after Dionysos (the Roman Bacchus), at whose festivals the poems of Æschylus were first recited, and he was a descendant of those judges before whom Orestes was tried.

We shall suppose Dionysius to have been a pupil of Æschylus, and offer an account of his state of mind, which may easily be true. He rejects all the impure and false

elements in the Greek religion. An earnest seeker after God, he has a healthy conscience and real spiritual discernment. He makes the most of all the impulses and suggestions in *Æschylus* and in the best of the sages. His moral instincts and intuitions are keen and just, as far as they go. The very genius of the rock on which the Hebrew stands instructs the thoughtful Areopagite. It is to him a place clothed with majesty and supernatural terrors. Around it cluster all his best ideas of divine law, conscience, retribution, and reconciliation. There stood *Orestes* before the Areopagites of old. The sanctuary of the Furies is a few yards to the north, and perhaps while he hears the sermon, his eyes rest upon the savage cleft sacred to these dread goddesses. Above him, to the east, rises the Acropolis, 'the city of the gods,' where towers the colossal statue of *Athene*, with burnished helmet and spear, the grandest of all statues 'graven by art or man's device.' On that spot above all others *Dionysius* is reminded of moral law, personal obligation to God, the terrors of an awakened conscience, judgment to come, and the need of reconciliation and purification. His Greek theology has, through *Æschylus*, presented problems it cannot solve, and stimulated wants it cannot satisfy. He thus feels his need of divine guidance. In the spirit of *Socrates* and *Plato*, he does not look back to hoar antiquity for guidance, but he looks within and above. He cannot believe that his moral nature is a staring, purposeless half-hinge, to which nothing above him answers. *Æschylus* has taught him to find in the self-recommending light of nature a prophecy of the needed purification. His moral nature so far anticipates the answer which Christianity gives to its aspirations. His persuasion of the wisdom and goodness of God assures him that there must be some way of loosing the sinner from his guilt. *Orestes* embodies his creed.

In this mood the Hellen listens to the Hebrew, who leads him from *Jove* to *Jehovah*, from the realities of natural conscience to the realities of Christ. As the two stand upon

the same massive rock, so the Apostle meets the Greek upon broad common ground, and strikes into the current of his deepest convictions. It is a noteworthy coincidence that on the very rock where the religion of conscience unaided by revelation received its fullest expression, where Orestes was told how his soul could be purified from its stains, the Apostle declares how in Christ the sinful are purged from an evil conscience for the service of the living God.

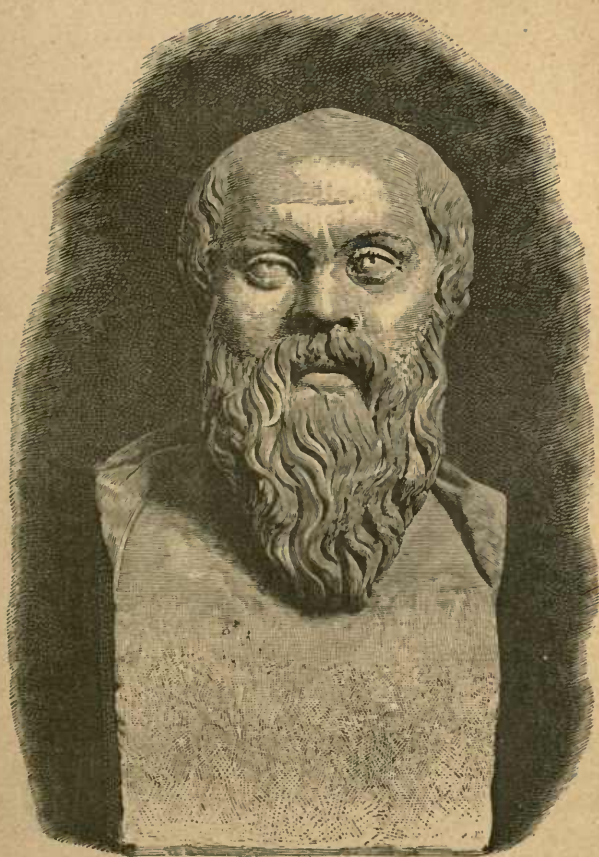
Paul praises the Greek's devotion to religion; deepens while correcting his conception of God; repeats the argument from design, the validity of which the Greek admits, and points out some of its necessary consequences; quotes a Greek poet as agreeing with him, and appeals to his expectation of judgment to come. The preacher finds in his apt hearer aspirations tending towards Christ, so that his words have closeness of touch.¹ They are felt to coincide with many of his slumbering feelings and ideas, which are thus brought into clear consciousness. His own sages had been forced to declare that the truly wise man, the ideal of virtue and moral heroism, had not yet appeared on the earth, and Cicero had even described the delight men would have if ever they saw perfect virtue alive and in the flesh. Christ is now presented to him as 'the nearer God' whom the sages longed to see.

Dionysius is delighted to find one who can give clear expression to the ruling but hitherto dumb desires of his heart, which have long waited for satisfaction. Lo, here at last is one who can both recall and interpret his but half-remembered dreams. The Apostle unfolds the distinguishing doctrines of the Gospel. We suppose him clearly to set forth man's transgression of God's perfect law and ruin by sin, the atoning work of Christ, the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, and the need of a personal faith in Christ. Are not these the very doctrines which our Dionysius might be disposed to welcome? Would he not find many a point

¹ We dismiss the gratuitous and unhappy suggestion, that the Apostle adopted at Mars' Hill a method which he afterwards abandoned at Corinth.

of contact between them and his deepest religious impressions? He would not readily imagine that atonement is a mere projection of the troubled human heart. Certainly nothing in his training would dispose him to be offended by the ideas of propitiation and reconciliation. Intellectually at least, it would be comparatively easy for him to believe that the Gospel is above, but not contrary to nature; that it is at once intensely supernatural and natural; supernatural in its provisions, natural in its manifold subtle adaptations to man's heart. He would frankly own that he needed divine aid, and he could believe that the Spirit of God imitates the course of nature, even when working above it, and that the religion of the Apostle is not a contradiction to nature. The element of miracle and mysteriousness in the new faith would not offend him, but might seem not only in harmony with the most honoured rights of ancient Hellas, but also as making provision for the appetite for the immense which even reason expects a revelation from God to gratify.

Æschylus, unconsciously and in ignorance, reveals the profound affinities between Christ and the natural conscience. He proves, to borrow a phrase from the Church Fathers, that the divine book and the human breast agree. We point to him as a proof that there abides in the inmost soul of man an indestructible Christ-need, which asserts itself to a thoughtful pagan, even when entangled with a contradictory theology, and belonging to an age and race intoxicated with materialism and sensuality. The pacification of the conscience and the purification of the soul which Æschylus sought, and in the reality of which he firmly believed, the Gospel offers to every man under heaven. What was but a dim and fleeting shadow to the great Greek is an historical reality to the Christian. The fancies of the Greek tragedian, corresponding in some respects so strangely in general outline with the faith of the Christian, may help us to believe that the Maker of our hearts is also the Author of the Gospel, and that in Christ Jesus He has made exquisitely complete provision for all the needs of sinning and perishing men.




SOCRATES.

II.

SOCRATES THE REFORMER OF HEATHENDOM.

[The writers specially consulted in the preparation of this chapter are Dr. Zeller, in his *Socrates and the Socratic Schools*, and Grote's *History of Greece*, vol. vi.]

E invoke imagination to carry us back twenty-three centuries, and plant us on a forenoon in the Agora, or great gathering-place of Athens. The scene is in the open air, and resembles a crowded exchange. 'Gay and gilded Greeks' move among the green willows and plane-trees, or gather here and there in little circles. Every man carries a walking-stick, as without it he is liable to be apprehended by the police and imprisoned for the night. Very few women are to be seen, for the chaste seldom venture into this Vanity Fair; they keep indoors, in the poorest back-rooms and garrets, and are seldom allowed to eat with the men. Yet we have around us a thronging crowd, for the men hate to be within doors except when they sleep; their houses are used but as a shelter for the night. These are very small, as the sites cut in the neighbouring rocks still show. The smallness of the private houses reveals the democratic equality, as the magnificence of the public buildings reveals the sovereignty of the people. The air is most serene, and rain seldom falls. Like their modern descendants, all the citizens have a great passion for politics and discussion, and their great public square is a sort of Parliament and Academy.

They are a work-hating, pleasure-loving crowd. The harbour lies four miles to the south, and the curse of slavery

has blighted them with a contempt for manual labour, so that one of their favourite maxims is that idleness is the sister of freedom. Every freeborn Athenian thinks that he has a divine right to be idle. In respect of the fruits of the earth, he believes that he is born to consume, not to create. Moreover, they hate every kind of work that injures the beauty of the body, and that they may gratify their intense intellectual ambitions they must have leisure, or *scholē*, as they call it.¹ They believe that the god-like life is a life of learned leisure. Their undulating and graceful figures are moving about amid statues ornamented with pure gold, and glowing with the richest colours. But the living are well-nigh as beautiful as the inanimate inhabitants of this charming city.

The 'beauties of the season' here are not young women but young men, and as they pass many turn round to gaze at them. Nearly all around are great dandies, for this race has in an unequalled degree the gift of physical beauty, which they esteem one of the chief goods of life; and all the freemen are well-trained athletes and soldiers. They count nothing holier than beauty of form, which is the main recommendation of even their priests. The head, bust, one arm, and the lower limbs are bare; they have blue eyes, and their light-brown hair falls in scented hyacinthine curls upon their shoulders; their feet display sandals with elegant thongs; their flowing dresses of white, relieved with patches of crimson, green, and blue, cleave closely to the mould of their bodies, and outline gracefully the figure in all its lithe movements.

Thus the Greeks, or, as they call themselves, the Hellenes, with every athletic and æsthetic charm, move amid kindred statues of breathing brass and blushing marble. Art is their religion. They are a nation of artists, and life is with them the foremost of the fine arts. We are in the centre of the

¹ Our word *school*. But with the Greeks the school was not for children, but only for grown-up people. Hence the school and leisure were united as in their name for both.

holy city of art, which is about the size of Edinburgh. There, a little to the south, is the Pnyx, which has supplied the world with models of oratory. Mars' Hill, a place of silent awe, rises like a wall of rock on the north side. Near at hand, on the east, towers the Acropolis, a rocky height, crowned with the grandest temples the world has seen. Statues of the gods, each a masterpiece, meet the eye on every side ; for it has been said that it was easier to find a god than a man in this city.

A big man in middle age moves past, attended by five or six youths of aristocratic bearing. Everybody seems to know him. He is evidently a 'character' and a 'notability,' and his appearance is nearly as well known to us as it was to his own wife and boys. Some give him a twinkle of friendly recognition, or a smile of comic welcome, while others, who seem magnates, dart upon him a threatening glance. Mark him well. He is poorly clad and barefooted. He has a broad, arching, bold, deeply-lined forehead ; protruding eyes, a flattened, broken-backed nose, with wide upturned nostrils ; thick lips, broad, rounded shoulders, and an ample beard and moustache. His body is as strong as the oaks. With the frame of a Hercules he unites the physiognomy of a Satyr. His fellow-citizens speak of it as an astonishing thing that the best man among them should be also the ugliest, for they believe that beauty of body is the seal of the soul's inner beauty. You cannot help noticing his piercing eyes. They have a serenity without a trace of agitation, and he looks right into you and through you. Few can bear his glance and return it fearlessly.

He halts under the shadow of a spreading plane-tree, and a passing remark about the weather leads to a conversation with a loiterer. Idlers gather round, expecting a treat ; they are in a bantering, chaffing mood, but soon their hushed attention shows that they are under a magnetic fascination. They all press eagerly towards the centre, and those at the circumference turn the head sideways to catch every word. With a rich, musical voice, he guides the

conversation up to some interesting theme of morals or social life, and cross-questions his neighbour, who has incautiously committed himself to a proposition. His wonderful freshness, genial humour, and ready wit, call forth the frequent applause of the audience, and soon he can do with them what he wills. The crowd bursts into hearty laughter, and, the next minute, by a sudden pathetic turn, he brings tears to their eyes. He is a very master of conversational magic, who, while charming his hearers, often convinces their hearts, and makes them ashamed of the meanness of their lives. He is concerned that his hearers should not leave him without having a great truth lodged in their minds. This is Socrates, the best known man in Athens then, and of all the Athenians the best known man in the world to-day. He is one of the most original figures in the world's history, for he imitated no one before him, and has not been imitated by any one after him. He stands forth to the gaze of mankind as the grandest man of classical antiquity, the chief of the spiritual heroes of Heathendom. He was regarded by the ancients as a man past imitation, and honoured with an almost divine homage.

Our natural curiosity to know his personal history cannot be gratified; except in respect of the last month of his life. Socrates is a literary Melchizedec. The Samuel Johnson of Greece, he had no Boswell. Plato and Xenophon, two of his pupils, are his only biographers. Xenophon, one of the great generals and statesmen of his day, does not give us a biography of Socrates. He gives us only the *Memorabilia*, or memorable things of Socrates, his aim being to describe the trial and death of his master, and defend him against his accusers. Plato, the *vates sacer* of Socrates, was a poet and system-builder, and his notices of his master are incidental, and probably not historically reliable. At least, he gives us a highly-coloured photograph of the great sage.

Socrates was the son of Sophroniscus, the stone-cutter, and Phænarete, the midwife. He tells us that his mother was a woman of great worth and ability. He was born at Alopeke

(now Ambelokipo), a little village two miles N.E. of Athens, on the Marathon road. Full in sight of his home, on the north, rose the marble mountain of Pentelicus. The boy would often gaze on the huge cream-coloured scar, out of which was quarried the marble which had made Athens so famous. Lumbering marble-laden waggons were passing his door every day, and several Athenian sculptors were then rising to fame and fortune. As marble was the one great thing in his first horizon, it was natural that the boy should resolve to be a sculptor. Pausanias says that some of his works, three draped statues of the Graces, found a place within the Acropolis. He was very thoughtful in youth, and necessity made him his own teacher. What a pity that the Hugh Miller of Athens has not bequeathed to us the story of *My Schools and Schoolmasters*! The Athenians laughed at the physiognomist who described Socrates as a crabbed, lustful, ill-natured man; but Socrates declared that that was an exact account of his natural disposition, and that he had gained the conquest over it by philosophy.

Socrates married Xantippe, a woman of no culture, of whom nothing lives in history but her bad temper. She is the classical type of the shrew. From her point of view she had some reason for her scolding, for her bread-winner did not earn much to keep house with, as—we do not know exactly when—he ceased working, and gave all his time to philosophy. He maintained that her bad temper qualified her to be the wife of a philosopher, or to make a philosopher of her husband, just as a man wishing to learn horsemanship would choose not the tamest but the wildest horse. Such words were not idle pleasantry, for he really turned his domestic affliction into a means of grace, whereby he conquered his temper, and achieved that thorough self-mastery, without which, he held, no man could be a real philosopher. He did not agree with Euripides—

When angry woman 'gins to rail,
A prudent husband lowers sail,
And scuds away before the gale.

Socrates unflinchingly submitted himself to his domestic discipline. One day, after an angry scolding, his wife poured over him a pailful of foul water. He only shook himself and quietly said, 'After thunder we usually have rain.' He had three sons, whom he earnestly taught to love and reverence their mother, suggesting that her angry outbursts were provoked by her baffled anxiety to do her best for them.

Athenian though he was, Socrates was not in the least distressed by his ungainliness. He playfully maintained that it gave him an advantage over other men. His short, flat nose did not narrow the range of his vision, he said, while his protruding eyes saw not only in front of him but on both sides, and his upturned nostrils enabled him to smell better than others could. He was remarkably frugal and temperate. Bread, water, and a few olives served him, as they serve the Athenian boor to-day. Like all able-bodied Greeks, he had fought for his country on the battlefield. Few men could equal him in enduring the extremes of heat, cold, and fatigue. His great mind was served by a leonine body. He was very brave, and saved the life of Alcibiades, one of his famous pupils, at the risk of his own. Though he did not meddle in politics, he cherished great reverence for the laws of the land. He did not care for the country. 'Trees and fields teach me nothing,' he used to say; 'men are my teachers.' Like every wise reformer, he gave his best strength to the education of the young. He devoted himself heart and soul to his work. While other teachers around him were making fortunes, he would not accept a fee, as he said with 'his accustomed irony' that he had nothing to teach. He also thought it unworthy to exchange knowledge for gold. Truth was the chosen bride of his soul, and he showed that he could love her well without a dowry.

The magnificent scholarship of our day has shed an illuminating light upon the whole environment of Socrates. He lived in the most stimulating epoch of the golden age of ancient Greek thought. His boyhood and middle age fall within the glory period of Greece. At Marathon and Salamis

a handful of Greeks had conquered the millions of Persia and won freedom for the world. But for their soldiership all Europe might to-day have been like Afghanistan or Turkey. These victories gave an enormous stimulus to Greek intellect, and ushered in a period of the highest creative genius in the history of mankind. Themistocles, Cimon, and Pericles then changed the city from brick to marble; Greece became the 'Holy Land of the Ideal,' and Athens the metropolis of the mind. Its hills and streets were as forests of breathing statues amid glowing pictures—

And human hands first mimicked and then mocked,
With moulded limbs more lovely than its own,
The human form, till marble grew divine.

The artists, poets, orators, and thinkers of that age have given models and laws to mankind. 'In that age'—to quote Joseph Cook—'for every 5000 Grecian men there was one man whom after ages have recognised as a man of genius. Though in its best days Attica had not more than 90,000 freemen, yet in 2000 years all Europe has not given birth to 28 men as famous as 28 whom Greece produced in 200 years; and the average ability of the Greeks of that age excels ours as much as ours excels that of the Africans.' Athens, to quote Gibbon, then 'condensed within the period of a single life, the genius of ages and millions.' Their language is still the most beautiful and perfect instrument of human thought.

Thus Greece, though not quite half the size of Scotland, and the greater part of it as rocky and Alpine as the Western Highlands, is honoured as the schoolmistress of the world. All civilised nations are colonies of Hellas; and, as Shelley says, 'We are all Greeks.'

But these prodigalities of successful genius were wedded to a frightful corruption of manners. 'Art is the bloom of decay,' 'Religions die like the sun: their last rays, possessing little heat, are spent in creating beauty'—these sayings might seem to be justified by the Athens of Socrates. Under the excesses of extreme democracy public life was demoralised.

The old pieties and reverences of social life were disappearing with the old religious faith before a deluge of sensuality. For many weary years Greek fights with Greek. They fiercely turn against each other the arms which had conquered the Persians. Athens, Sparta, Corinth, Megara, Thebes, etc., all mingle in the fray, and the land bleeds from unnumbered wounds. The popular leaders—no longer guides—show a boundless vanity, and a shameful lack of principle and patriotism. Education is in the hands of the Sophists, who (according to Plato and Zeller, Grote protesting) are the hirelings, not the lovers of wisdom, who give more attention to words than to things, and more attention to manner and pronunciation than to words. These quacks and wordsmen disregard moral distinctions and debauch conscience. They desire knowledge not that they may know, but that they may be known, especially in the marts of lip-labour. For a handsome fee they teach the art of making the worse appear the better reason, and supply unprincipled cleverness with the means of gratifying its ignoble ambitions. Aspiring young men learn from them the secrets of political success and fame. The priests have no healthy influence, for they only perform rites which have lost their meaning. They care nothing for the cure of souls, and their religion has no alliance with morality. Their ritualism was like that of the Italian brigands, who hasten to the shrine of Mary to give thanks for a successful robbery. There is not one real prophet among them. They never dream of teaching or preaching. Even Xenophon, one of Socrates' best pupils, allowed his soldiers to plunder the cattle of the people of Trebizond—with whom they were not at war—that with the prey they might sacrifice to the gods. To make men virtuous, Lecky says, was no more the function of the priest than of the physician. Had the popular gods appeared as men and women on earth, they would often have been apprehended by the constable and beaten by the magistrate with many stripes, and transported to a penal settlement. Many of the most famous shrines were confessedly dens of unblush-

ing infamy. Socrates passionately loves his people, and asks, 'Can I do nothing to heal these deplorable maladies? Am I to stand idly by while this glorious nation perishes in its sins?' He ponders this question as only noble natures can when inspired by lofty aims and chastened by great sorrows. After years of deep study he appears as a moral missionary and preacher of righteousness, and becomes the most original and influential of the Reformers of Heathendom. He stands among the foremost of those 'Greeks who seek after wisdom.' He belongs not to Athens but to the world, not to his epoch but to the ages: he is still one of the world's fresh and unspent forces.

Socrates' conception of his heavenly calling is the key to the right understanding of his life. Intensely pious, and living in the presence of God, he speaks of his call almost as definitely and confidently as the Apostle Paul does. Cicero expresses Socrates' rooted conviction when he says, 'Never yet has there been a great man without some divine influence.' He firmly believes that heavenly guidance is granted to the upright in heart, and always maintains that the heavenly voice within has commanded him to forswear politics and devote his life to the practice and teaching of virtue. It is not easy to find out precisely what he means by 'the divine thing' in him, which is usually called his *dæmon*. He does not personify it. He has heard it, he tells us, from his boyhood. It seems to be like the inward voice of the Friends; a sort of warning genius or oracle in his soul; a kind of familiar spirit which he ascribes to God. It comes near the idea of the Christian angel. It is not the same as, though closely related to, conscience. It acts mainly as a restraint; is a bridle, not a spur. Perhaps this is just his own strong way of saying that the voice of conscience is the voice of God, and the only true guide of a good man. He always confesses the weakness of the human faculties, and ascribes all his good thoughts to heavenly inspiration, which is the good genius of his life. Believing firmly in a particular providence, he is persuaded that he has

the divine guidance which he earnestly seeks, and so he enters upon his life-work with great courage and the abiding belief that he is obeying the will of God.

Few men ever had a more clearly-defined aim in life. As there were brave men before Agamemnon, and Reformers before the Reformation, so there were no doubt earnest truth-seekers before Socrates.

Grey spirits yearning in desire
To follow knowledge like a sinking star
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought!

But, so far as history informs us, Socrates was the first in Heathendom who made it his aim to set forth the great truths of morality, and who had marked success in his work. He has thus creative originality of the highest order—originality in what is true, practical, and beneficent. He was the pioneer who planted the first flag on the continent of practical ethics. Professor Blackie calls him ‘the father of moral science.’ Thought before Socrates, Ferrier says, was almost wholly physical, seldom intelligible, when intelligible seldom credible, and when credible wholly useless. Socrates perceives that we live in a moral world, of which the physical is but a small part, and he has a great fear of wasting life in things useless or too high for him. He is content to leave the problem of the universe unsolved, if only he can find or make a safe path through it for the feet of men. Like Goethe, he has no time ‘to think about thinking,’ and he sees clearly that ‘the proper study of mankind is man.’ He therefore turns from the world without to the world within, from physics to morals, and also from words to things, and thus he stands alone in Athens. The brilliant Sophists are teaching how to argue; in the homeliest fashion he would fain teach how to live. He is occupied with the useful, while nearly every one around him is occupied with the outwardly beautiful. The aim of the Sophists, as one of them phrased it, was to make little things appear great; his, to make things appear as they are.

It is settled with him that a good life is the highest fruit of philosophy and genius, and that he cannot succeed as a politician or in any other calling who fails as a man. He would therefore make good and true men, beginning with himself. I say men, for he never dreams of educating the women and the children. He has strong faith in self-improvement, and wishes every one patiently and harmoniously to develop all his faculties, and become as good and great a man as it is possible for him to be. His ideal of manhood is in advance of his age, and substantially just. Two quotations will show that he states it in well-nigh Christian words. In the *Gorgias*, one of Plato's dialogues, he earnestly teaches that 'virtue is or should be the end of all our actions; that in the long-run the just or temperate man alone is happy; that the evil liver is abhorred by gods and men while upon earth, and goes down to Hades with his soul branded with the scars of his crimes; and that there must be a day of judgment and retribution, when each shall receive the just reward of his deeds.' He concludes in words almost apostolic, 'Now I am persuaded of the truth of these things, and I consider how I shall present my soul whole and undefiled before the Judge in that day. Renouncing the honours at which the world aims, I desire only to know the truth, and to live as well as I can, and to die when the time comes. And to the utmost of my power I exhort all men to do the same. And I exhort you also to take part in the great contest, which is the contest of life, and greater than every other earthly comfort.' Listen now to this prayer of Socrates, with which the *Phædrus* closes. 'O beloved Pan, and all ye gods, whose dwelling is in this place, grant me to be beautiful in soul, and all that I possess of outward things to be at peace with those within. Teach me to think wisdom the only riches. And give me so much wealth, and so much only, as a good and holy man could manage and enjoy.'

Socrates is not one of your heroes of vulgar success, for his life ended in seeming failure. 'But nothing in his life became him like the leaving it': his elegy is his best eulogy.

After perhaps some thirty or even forty years of consistent missionary work, he suffered martyrdom at the hands of the Athenians. Zeller gives a delightfully luminous account of the influences which united against him. He was bitterly hated by all the scribes and Pharisees in Athens, whom he had mercilessly exposed. When detected, they were angry with him, he said, instead of being angry with themselves.

Aristophanes, the comic poet, had, in *The Clouds*, ridiculed him with boundless cleverness. Money-making fathers hated him for having won their sons over to unremunerative study and inoculated them with unworldly ideas, and with some show of reason blamed him for encouraging idleness. He certainly had not preached 'the gospel of getting on.' The Athenians were then greatly irritated by twenty-seven years of civil war, which had ended in their complete humiliation. The party in power believed that Socrates' views came very near treason to the sovereign people. They could not forget that he had been neutral in the death-struggle of his country, that their most detested opponents had been his pupils, and that he regarded their government as a failure. Thus they blamed him for all the misfortunes of the State. Then many had been hurt by his teaching, especially by his cross-questioning, and felt rebuked by his unselfish life. They were like their fathers, who once met to decide who should be banished from the city. An unlettered citizen asked Aristides, whom he did not know, to write a name for him. 'And what name shall I write?' Aristides asked. 'Aristides,' was the reply. 'And, pray, what wrong has he done you?' 'Oh, none, but I am tired of hearing him always called the Just.'

With fame, in just proportion, envy grows :
The man that makes a character, makes foes.

Further, many conservatives, preserving the prejudices after they had lost the convictions and virtues of their ancestors, wished to bring back 'the good old times,' and deemed Socrates the chief obstacle in their way. So far they were correct, for he had quietly dropped the alien parts

of the old religion, and he sought for the ultimate foundations of morality not in the old myths nor in the authority of the State, but in reason and conscience. The Greeks were also very impulsive, and afflicted with spasms of popular excitement, so that Athens deserved the title given to Paris, 'the city of revolutions.'¹ The tendency to faction was the malady of the ancient, as it still is of the modern, Athenian. Thus Socrates was accused of not believing in the gods of Greece, and of corrupting the young men. For the distinction of Church and State was unknown to Heathendom, and the care of religion was believed to be both the right and the duty of the civil magistrate, religion being with them only a matter of outward conformity, merely a political duty. Religion was thus established and endowed in Athens, and the State fixed the national creed, and inflicted pains and penalties upon all who dissented from it.

Socrates thus stands before us as a splendid representative of the rights of conscience and private judgment. In the realm of Heathendom he fought the very battle of religious liberty that has made Luther and Knox illustrious. He is the Protestant, the Reformer, the Puritan, the Covenanter, the Confessor and Martyr of Heathendom. He believed that the dominion of the State should end where the dominion of conscience begins. He believed in the empire within the empire. He valued spiritual independence, and thought it worth his while to die rather than surrender it. His defence before his judges recalls Luther at Worms, for he then spoke in the spirit and almost in the very words of Peter and John before the Sanhedrim: 'We ought to obey God rather than man.'

Let us now try to picture the sublimest and most interesting scene in pre-Christian history. Its value for us is greatly enhanced by the consideration that we have not as full a dying confession of any other of the great sages. In the year 399 B.C., and in the seventieth year of his age, Socrates

¹ The Ancient Hellenes have been compared to the modern French, and the Romans to the English.

was condemned to death by a majority of only five or six in a court that numbered 557 judges. He might easily have secured an acquittal, but he offended his judges by a defence that breathed the spirit of defiance. He would not accept at the hand of Pity what he demanded from the hand of Justice. He could not act the mob-courtier. Death had no terrors for him, for he believed that it was better for him to die at such an age, and he even accepted his death as a token of the love of Heaven. 'Anytus and Miletus' (his accusers) 'may indeed slay me, but harm me they cannot,' he declared to his judges. Like many of the sages of antiquity, he felt no touch of remorse in reviewing his past. He did not prepare his defence; his genius would not suffer him, he said; and besides, his whole life had been a preparation for it. He told his judges that, should they acquit him on condition of his ceasing to teach, he would at once resume his old work, even though a thousand deaths awaited him, as he feared disgrace and dishonour more than death.

In his case 'last words were lasting words.' 'Ye men of Athens,' he said (using the same title as did the Apostle), 'I honour and love you, but I shall obey God rather than you.' He was not made of oak or rock, he told them, but was a creature of flesh and blood, yet he would not appeal to their compassion by presenting his weeping wife and children. He hoped, however, that when he was gone they would corrupt his sons as he had always striven to corrupt theirs—by teaching them humility and virtue. The sentence of death made no change either in his spirit or manner. Some one had previously said to him, 'The tyrants have sentenced thee to death;' 'And nature them,' he replied. His wonted humour still sparkled in his conversation. 'It grieveth me, my Socrates, to have you die so unjustly,' sobbed one of his disciples. Socrates, with much tenderness, laying his hand upon his disciple's head, answered smilingly, 'And what, my much-loved Apollodorus, wouldst thou rather they had condemned me justly?'

His friends unfolded to him a plan by which he might

escape from prison. But with a smile he asked if they knew any place beyond Attica where death could not approach him. He declared that a mystic voice which hindered him from hearing any other was always murmuring in his ears, and that the laws of Athens were saying to him that if he returned evil for evil, they would be angry with him while he lived, and their brethren, the laws of the world below, would receive him as an enemy.

The last day of his life was spent among his disciples, and is fascinatingly described in Plato's *Phædo*. In his last hours the sage discourses upon death, the soul's immortality, and the blessed hereafter. He is quite himself, as calm, and genial, and quick-witted as ever. His cheerfulness rises to a gentle gaiety. Though he gracefully and affectingly admits that his arguments are scarcely sufficient, he passionately clings to the belief in immortality, and is fully assured that 'no evil can happen to the good man in life or death.' By the playful application of a fable he shows that the last day of his earthly life should be the gladdest, and that he should be like the swan that dies singing. Here are a few of his last sayings: 'But then, O my friend, if the soul is really immortal, what care should be taken of her, not only in respect of the portion of time which is called life, but of eternity. And the danger of neglecting her from this point of view does indeed appear to be awful. For there is no release or salvation from evil except by the highest virtue and wisdom.' 'In the other world the dead have sentence passed upon them as they have lived well and piously, or not.' 'Those who are remarkable for having led holy lives are released from this earthly prison and go to their pure home which is above, and dwell in the purer earth; and those who have duly purified themselves with philosophy, live henceforth altogether without the body, in mansions fairer than these, which may not be described, and of which the time would fail me to tell.'

He concludes in words almost apostolic: 'Wherefore, seeing all these things are so, what ought we not to do in

order to obtain virtue and wisdom in this life? Fair is the prize, and the hope great.' 'The venture is a glorious one, and the man of sense ought to comfort himself with words like these, which is the reason why I lengthen out the tale. Wherefore I say, let the man be of good cheer about his soul, who has cast away the pleasures and ornaments of the body as alien to him, and has followed all the pleasures of knowledge in this life; who has adorned the soul in her own proper jewels, which are temperance, and justice, and courage, and nobility, and truth; in these arrayed, she is ready to go on her journey to the world below when her time comes.'

Still the future was but a 'grand perhaps' to him, which was 'promised rather than proved by wise men,' for he says, 'I must now die, and you shall live; but which of us is in the better state, the living or the dead, God only knows.' Crito, one of his disciples, here asks, 'But in what way would you have us bury you?' He is hurt by the idea that in his last hour he could have a care about that part of him which was not immortal, and makes reply, 'In any way you like, only you must get hold of me, and take care that I do not walk away from you.' With a smile he beseeches them all to be of good cheer, and remember that they would bury not Socrates, but his poor body only. He then goes and bathes, that he may save the women the trouble of washing his dead body. After the bath he takes farewell of his wife and children, and dismisses them, that he may not be distracted by their weeping. It must be added that his seeming coldness and impatience in dismissing them pain us.

The jailer, his executioner, enters and bursts into tears, for he, too, has come under the spell. He protests that Socrates is 'the noblest, and gentlest, and best' of all that had ever come to the prison. Socrates returns his good wishes, and thanks him for his generous sorrow. The jailer holds out the cup of hemlock juice, which Socrates takes and drinks as cheerfully as men at a banquet drink their favourite wine. But before he drinks it off he says, 'I must

pray the gods to prosper my journey from this to the other world.' As he drinks the poison his disciples fall a-weeping and break out into loud cries. Socrates, who alone retains his calmness, begs them to be quiet and let him die in peace. He walks up and down the room, till the poison benumbs his limbs, and then he lies on his back and covers his face. His last words show that he shared to the end the superstitions of his age. 'Crito,' he said, 'I owe a cock to Æsculapius; will you remember to pay the debt?' Godet ingeniously suggests that he sacrificed to the god of healing in gratitude for that perfect remedy for the ills of life and for the immortal health he was henceforth to enjoy in the company of the gods. Another writer¹ offers the explanation that the cup of poison cured the disease with which the immoral atmosphere of Athens had oppressed him. 'The debt shall be paid,' Crito replied. 'Is there anything else?' No answer is returned, but in a minute or two a movement is heard, and the attendants uncover him. His eyes are fixed in death. Crito closes his mouth and eyes.

We can now understand how Socrates, transfigured by such a death and idealised by the magic pen of Plato, seemed to the ancients the prince of men, and, as Döllinger phrases it, 'a vision of wonder past imitation.'

The glory of Heathendom, he is in some respects the reproach of Christendom. Unaided by Christianity, without any worthy teacher or example, guided only by what nature and conscience had to tell him, and amid moral difficulties to us inconceivable, he cheerfully lived a life of great self-sacrifice in obedience to what he believed to be the will of God, and in order to benefit his fellow-men. The deeply-affecting and humbling fact is, that his life is far nobler, and in some respects more Christ-like, than the lives of millions who claim the Christian name. *Christianos docet paganus*: this pagan teaches Christians. We must now ascertain the methods and beliefs by which Socrates attained such vast achievements.

¹ Jackson, *The Doctrine of Retribution*, p. 21.

1. **He was a Critic and Doubter.**—He adopts all the methods of the critic and the doubter. He has to clear a space for himself by overturning prevailing errors. The Sophists are already in the field, offering to teach all wisdom for a handsome fee. He must challenge and expose these Pretenders and Claimants, who are all, he believes, for self and show. He must also summon to the bar of reason most of the popular beliefs. He has a perfect passion for clear ideas and plain words. He hopes by his philosophy to separate the seeming from the real, and reach the region where the real and apparent are the same. He is a great preacher of reality, and hater of shams and make-believes. None more anxious than he to get beyond the vestures and 'the mere clothes' and semblances of things to things themselves; none more impatient of mere hearsays and shadows; none more eager to converse with naked facts. He sees clearly that the life of men is largely made up of delusions reduced to practice, and of words mistaken for things, and that men in their greatest affairs are influenced by things not as they are, but as they are called. He is always cherishing his relish for realities.

The Athenian so far resembles the Scottish moralist. Indeed, Carlyle's favourite phrases about shams, etc., are borrowed from Socrates, through Plato and the Germans. It is said that Carlyle, reading Plato late in life, exclaimed 'Why, that is what I have been saying all these years past.' But Socrates, while a keen detector of other people's shams, is greatly afraid of being a maker of his own, and hence he cherishes a fierce hatred of big words, those 'prancing steeds,' he calls them, by which men are carried away from the truth. With all the eagerness of a detective he loves to track every error home to its last hiding-place, which he usually finds to be a many-syllabled ambiguity. He has an almost malicious pleasure in harassing men who use evasive or elusive phrases. It would have fared ill with any man in Athens who was often speaking of the everlasting yea and nay, the solemnities, the immensities, the unutterable silences, the

dread kingdoms, the awful unnameable of this universe, the baphometric fire-baptism. Meno tells us that Socrates' criticism had in such a case the effect of a torpedo's shock on him: all his thoughts deserted him, and his mental faculties were benumbed.

2. His Cross - questioning.—He also constantly uses the method of catechising and cross-questioning. To ask questions, he says, is the half of all knowledge, and life is not worth living without the privilege of cross-questioning. He cares little for books, because they cannot be cross-questioned, and therefore cannot truly teach. He does not wish men to forage abroad for wisdom, and leave their home-farm, their reason, untilled. He believes that great nature is always speaking wisdom to man. He often arouses attention by startling paradoxes which occasion mutual catechising. Ignorance mistaking itself for knowledge he finds to be the chief evil with all men, and therefore the first step towards real progress is to take the conceit out of men, and make them ashamed of their ignorance, and thus rescue them from the folly which is reputed wisdom. He is distressed that men take no interest in the development of their characters. One told him that such a one was nothing improved by his travels. 'I believe it,' said he, 'for he took himself along with him.' The Oracle of Delphi, he says, declared him to be the wisest of men, because he only knew that he knew nothing; and ever since he has cross-questioned his neighbours, that he might find a wiser man than himself, and have his own ignorance remedied. This is usually called the Socratic irony. When people speak of the Socratic method, they usually mean his unique way of asking questions, by which he dexterously confounds his opponent and explains his own views. He knows well that his methods may call forth anger. He is not ignorant of 'Fancy's fondness for the child she bears.' He often finds that a man's notions are his darlings, and that he is as attached to the offspring of his mind as to the offspring of his body. When depriving

men of their favourite ideas, he says, 'Do not quarrel with me, as the manner of women is when their first children are taken from them;' to us a pathetic illustration, for it is borrowed from the then common practice of infanticide. He likens himself to a gadfly given to the State by God to rouse a noble but sluggish steed. He is a wrestler, a conversational Antæus, some one has called him, who compels every new-comer, willing or unwilling, to wrestle with him; and his antagonist is usually thrown to the ground. Yet his kindly interest in all the ways and works of men, his evident sincerity, his public spirit, and his unfailing fund of genial wit make him popular with the many. His wrath is easily kindled by a mob of vague ideas clothed in big words. Define, define; distinguish, distinguish; divide, divide; these are his mottoes as to method. He gains his clear ideas by attending to definitions. 'To Socrates,' says Aristotle, 'we may unquestionably assign two novelties—inductive discourses and the definitions of general terms.' His method ceased with him. 'No man,' says Grote, 'has ever been strong enough to bend his bow, much less sure enough to use it as he did.'

3. His Creed.—He is, however, no mere iconoclast, busied solely with the work of destruction. He is a constructive as well as a critical thinker. The ignorance of which he speaks so often is not a doctrine but an experience; and between these there is a wide difference. His ruling desire is to reveal to men the solid foundations of truth and virtue; and he has given to moral science a new subject, new matter, new methods, and new models. He turns the thoughts of men from the world without to the world within, makes them dive into the depths of their own nature to discover the laws of their being, which are laws of God's making, and to secure reverence for these laws he appeals to their noblest instincts and interests. He cannot believe that his nature is a lie, and the author of it a deceiver. He questions first principles out of common people, and appeals from themselves to themselves till he

gains their assent to first truths. He is ever echoing the words, 'Know thyself.' Virtue is his chief end, reason and conscience his chief means. The self-knowledge needed for a virtuous life is difficult, he admits, but attainable, and the possession of it should be the highest ambition of every man. He appraises knowledge because he believes that thinking men can be permanently influenced only by clearly understood doctrines, that ignorance is the greatest of all evils, and knowledge the source of all virtues; but knowledge with him, as in the Book of Proverbs, means wisdom. He teaches that God has created universal laws, of which conscience is the witness, and that all vice springs from ignorance of these laws, while virtue is a realising knowledge of them. Hence a man must be a knower in order to be a doer, and he refuses to believe that a true knower will be an evil liver. In this he does not do justice to the heart, and forgets that often men do not will according to their reason, but reason according to their will. He has thus scant respect for cram and goosequill learning. He educates men, draws out what is involved in their make, aims at bringing to consciousness, and clearness, and imperial power the great principles that reside in the reason and conscience of every man. With a playful reference to his mother's art, he often describes himself as an 'accoucheur of ideas,' who assists men in the birth-labour of thought, and brings forth from them the dim ideas struggling in their minds. Withal he owns the necessity of divine assistance, and craves it, and is sure that he is favoured with it. The prayerless man he ranks among madmen, and likens him to a king who plucks off his crown with his own hand, and declares himself unworthy to reign.

4. His Idea of God.—History gives Socrates the honour of being, among writers unacquainted with the Bible, the first who clearly states in a scientific form the argument from marks of design. He might be called the author and finisher of this argument, as Paley and the authors of the Bridgewater Treatises have done little more

than add fresh illustrations of it.¹ This idea, a commonplace with us, was really original with him. Anaxagoras, the friend of Pericles, was surnamed Intelligence, because he referred all things to mind or intellect. His highest truth was that 'intelligence disposes all things.' By intelligence, however, he seems to have meant an impersonal force, and he lapsed into materialism in his explanations. It was Socrates who naturalised the true idea of design, and gave it currency among men. The highest truth with him is not some thing, but some One. He holds that the world proves the existence and wisdom of the supreme world-builder, and that every part of His work bears the stamp of His intelligence, just as thunder and wind, these servants of the gods, though invisible, are known by their effects. All created things have for him one centre and one plan, and so form a universe in the sense in which the learned now explain the term, viz.: 'that which is turned towards one.' As the ship is more than timber, so to him the world is more than matter. In everything he finds a thought. He could not believe that man is for man the measure of the universe. He introduces the fruitful idea of a controlling spirit, and maintains that the laws of nature agree with the laws of our thought. He teaches that 'as we know our soul by its operations, so we know the Deity by His works.' He at the same time believes that we cannot find out the nature of God. He says well, slaves do not need to know the nature of their masters, for they have nothing to do but serve. 'Learn, therefore,' he says, 'not to despise those things which you cannot see; judge the greatness of the power by the effects produced, and reverence the Deity.' Yet, like Æschylus, he does not break with the popular polytheism. He enlarges and purifies the character of Jupiter, and makes all the other gods his vassals. Nor does he rise through

¹ J. S. Mill, though nurtured in utter Atheism, at the close of a life of study, has admitted the scientific validity of this argument. — *Essay on Theism*, pp. 155, 172, 174.

blind nature-forces to the complete conception of a free Creator, who made all things out of nothing. His highest thought is that of an architect or builder of the world, who uses materials already in existence, and employs the lesser gods as his artisans. His piety is very deep, and moulds his life. Amid the numberless opposing gods of Greece, his soul finds unity and repose in the idea of one supreme God. 'Whether or no,' he says, 'God will approve of my actions, I know not; but this I am sure of, that I have at all times made it my endeavour to please Him.' His devotional utterances recall the poet's words—

In Christian hearts, oh for a pagan zeal !

5. His Idea of Man.—He teaches that man easily lapses into brutehood; but that all sensuality is contrary to reason and our noblest impulses. The great problem with him is to find a stable foundation for morality without assailing the popular religion. He turns to reason and conscience as God-given guides, proves that God is the author and vindicator of moral laws, and glorifies good sense and healthy instincts. He believes that reason can discover the eternal certainties of moral truth. Bentham, Mill, and their school have claimed him as an Utilitarian, but without justice. He, no doubt, identifies the good with the useful and the beautiful; but he has strong faith in divinely-planted moral ideas. He teaches truth, however, as men are able to bear it, and does not rise too far above the level of his hearers, and thus often gives his strength to proving that it is well with the virtuous, and ill with the vicious. In his eagerness to get into touch with his hearers he sometimes carries accommodation too far, so that the Preacher contradicts the Philosopher. He has a profound reverence for conscience, and does his utmost to educate it. He used to say 'that there was one wife from whom he could never be divorced—conscience; and he feared vastly that the lack of harmony between him and this wife would destroy his peace in the eternal mansions.'

6. The Last Things.—Regarding the last things he is a true interpreter of the light of nature, though he warns us that he has not attained full assurance, and that he offers only guesses at truth, or ‘divine peradventures.’ Still he believes in judgment to come, in final rewards and punishments, and in the immortality of the soul, though often speaking of it as a grand Perhaps. Bishop Butler reproduces in substance his argument for immortality. He thus shows us that moral insight is not an attainment due to modern development, and gives us a refreshing conviction that the fundamental truths of natural morality belong to all men. He teaches that in the other world men will be stript of all their earthly distinctions, that their naked souls will be judged, and that the good will be sent to the Isles of the Blest, while the evil will be cast into Tartarus. As Greek artists have made imitators of nearly all their successors, so Socrates has left little room for originality to subsequent moral philosophers.

7. The Success of Socrates.—His power as an educator and inspirer of men has rarely been equalled, and no teacher seems to have excelled him in making friends of all his pupils. Two of them left their native country for his sake, and another, belonging to a state at war with Athens, used to disguise himself as an old woman, and run the risk of death, that he might often visit his master. Though very poor, and to an Athenian ridiculously ugly, many young Athenian nobles became attached to him for life. He exerted over all sorts of men that mystic influence called personal magnetism. His charm remained in old age, for his healthy-heartedness, love of study, and intellectual freshness continued to the very end. He urged his disciples to listen to the inward voice of the divine law, and to believe that the sordid soul is ‘an outcast from the gods, and the contempt and scorn of all good men.’ He strove to lure them away from shameful passion, and to persuade them that self-indulgence was deadly to manhood. He appealed to their nobleness of disposition, and fired them with the

love of a virtuous and useful life. In many a case he was successful. His teaching led to moral conversions, and produced the noblest men in Athens. Though he wrote no book and founded no system, he created, with the one grand exception, the greatest epoch in the history of the human mind. Not only did he annex new islands and provinces, but it may be said that he discovered a new continent in the world of ethics. His errors were the errors of his age, while many of his truths were, we might almost say, discovered by him. He wished not to supply men with a ready-made system, but to make them deep and just thinkers; thus his teaching had a manifold suggestiveness. His life is the great watershed where rise those streams of thought which are still flowing through the world. Moral men who reject revelation still fall back upon his teaching. 'My father's moral inculcations,' says J. S. Mill,¹ 'were at all times mainly those of the *Viri Socratici*.' But Socrates would have abhorred the atheism of Mr. Mill, for he declares that the man who does not adore God is a philosophical lunatic and an irrational. His biography is the book of origins in the history of Philosophy, and he was 'the father of philosophers,' and the teacher of the world's teachers.

Plato and Aristotle, those two intellectual popes of the Middle Ages, as they still are in our universities, were his pupils, and owed nearly everything to him. The sceptics and cynics both claimed him as their own, for they isolated and exaggerated some articles of his creed. From his teaching issued the two great sects of Rome—the Stoics, who based life upon duty without reference to happiness, and the Epicureans, who based life upon happiness without reference to duty. He also was the first to sketch the outlines of political science. His influence in the first centuries was helpful to the Church, for many of his followers then became Christians and leading defenders of the faith. The Church fathers had the kindest feeling towards him. Most of them regarded him as a schoolmaster

¹ *Autobiography*, p. 46.

to bring men to Christ, and Justin Martyr was willing to call him a Christian. Erasmus added to the invocation of Saints in his liturgy, 'O holy Socrates, pray for us.' The spirit of Socrates disposed his disciples candidly and favourably to consider the claims of Christ, for it revealed wants and quickened aspirations which Christ alone could satisfy. Very remarkable are his dissatisfaction with his attainments, and his anticipation of fuller light. He even predicts the coming of some heaven-sent guide. 'We are all wrong,' he says, 'we have gone out of the way, a divine teacher must come from heaven and lead us into the way of truth.'¹ He is ever pursuing the track 'which opens out of darkness into day.' On the utmost verge of discovered truth he stands with hands outstretched to heaven, yearning for more light. Thus reason brought him to the door of faith; and many of his disciples when the Gospel was preached to them, discovered that his teaching had a strong undercurrent which bore them Christ-wards.

8. Socrates and Christ.—Socrates was the best teacher and one of the best livers in Heathendom. Living in 'the golden prime' of Greek history, a citizen of Athens, 'the very foundry of ideas,' the companion of the most gifted of the sons of men, undistracted by any earthly calling or the endless demands of modern civilisation, he had unequalled advantages in his search for truth. He was a thorough student and assimilator, who explored all regions of knowledge, and summed up in himself the past and present of human thought. In him we see the highest water-mark of natural religion. Jesus of Nazareth had no connexion with the world's great thinkers, had only the education of a Galilean peasant, spent the most of His earthly life in daily toil, and died at the age of thirty-three. Yet we cannot compare, we can only contrast Christ and the Athenian sage. 'What a delusion it is,' even Rousseau exclaims, 'to venture to compare the son of Sophroniscus with the Son of Mary!'

¹ Xenophon, I. iv. 14. Plato, *Alcibiades*, II.

Take two testing instances:—home-life and humanity. Socrates seems to have had no true home-life. Nothing about him astonished Cato so much as his unconcern about the fact that he had a bad wife and worthless sons. He shares the Greek contempt for women. He thanked the gods daily for being man and not beast, male and not female, Greek and not barbarian. He does not teach the sanctity of female love. Plato represents him as teaching that weak children should be put to death, that healthy children should be reared by the State, and that no mother should know her own child. Like all the Greeks, he regards a wife as an indispensable evil, and wedlock as an arrangement for housekeeping. He does not object in theory and principle to social vice. Sensual indulgence is wrong, in his opinion, only when its excess destroys that self-mastery which is the crown of manhood. He wishes men to stop short only at the point of moderation in popular vices. Vice in his eyes loses all its evil by losing its extravagance and grossness. Evil women are unblamed by him, and he even recommends their society to young men. We are not quite sure that he ever opposed those unnatural vices which are so delicately mentioned in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, and which had enslaved the whole of Greece.

Socrates lived in the most humane age of the most humane race of Heathendom. Athens alone of ancient cities had an altar to Pity, which stood by the side of the altar to Wisdom. Athens alone had a provision for the poor, and maintained the children of all who were slain in war. Socrates devoted his long life to social reform, and had a passion for influencing men. According to the schoolboy quotation, his peculiarity was, that he brought philosophy down from heaven to the business and bosoms of men. Yet he never rises to any worthy conception of humanity. Such a conception was really impossible to him, for, as he did not believe in the common origin, he could not believe in the brotherhood of all men. Nationality is his highest thought.

All his sympathies are limited by the State. He has not the remotest idea of anything that makes the whole world kin. Great discoverer of truth though he is, the Columbus in the region of ethics, he does not discover in mankind the marks of a kindred race or common mould. He has no idea of bringing the whole world into neighbourhood, far less into brotherhood. He believes that men are earth-born, not heaven-born. He is no representative of the spirit and service of humanity. He shares the popular scorn of barbarians, that is, of all who are not Greeks. He never suggests the abolition of slavery, which he regards as an institution ordained by nature. It seemed to him most reasonable that the ignoble many should be the slaves of the noble few, and that the barbarians, that is, all the rest of the world, should be the slaves of Greece. Doubt as to the justice of this arrangement never entered his mind. Only his fellow-citizens are his fellow-men. He does not explicitly teach benevolence or the duty of forgiving injuries. 'A man's virtue,' he says, 'consists in conquering his friend by doing him good, and his enemy by doing him harm.' He counsels us to repay hate with hate, and likens the man who loves his enemy to the silly goat that kissed the fire and lost his beard. With him it is a disgrace to forgive an injury, and to kill an enemy is no murder. He would have agreed with Confucius, who asks, 'If you return good for evil, what will you return for good?' He agrees with the unanimous opinion of his age, that successful war is the chief glory of man. He has no yearning love, no bleeding compassion for the sinful and sorrowing. These facts give some colour to Young's harsh words—

As wise as Socrates, might justly stand
The definition of a modern fool.

Comtists wish to establish what they call 'the religion of humanity,' for which some would provide a ritual and a calendar. We declare that this new religion is a poor, broken, borrowed fragment of the religion of Christ; and we prove

it by appealing to Socrates and to all non-Christian thought. We can now easily trace the idea of humanity to its origin. Its ultimate origin is in the second chapter of Genesis, and Jesus is the Creator of modern humanity. Four writers have handled this subject admirably. Lecky, in his *History of European Morals*, proves that the shameful inhumanities of Heathendom were removed by the Church of Christ. Brace, in his *Gesta Christi*, proves in a lawyer-like fashion that the discoverer of the sources of all that is best in modern life must repair not to the Ilissus, but to the Kedron, not to the sages, but to Christ. Storrs, in *The Divine Origin of Christianity proved by its Historical Effects*, shows how the new conceptions introduced by Christ have new-made the world. Uhlhorn, in his *Christian Charity in the Ancient Church*, pours fresh light over this whole region. The Greco-Roman world was, he shows, a world without love, of which selfishness was the ruling principle. Christ's commandment to love was a new thing, and a wonder to the heathen. The modern idea of humanity was unknown to the religion and philosophy of the ancients. It was not a Greek, still less a Roman virtue. Scarcely a trace of it can be found, notwithstanding a few phrases in Seneca and others. Women were little better off than slaves, and marriage was merely a political institution. No word for our home is found in either the Greek or Latin. The old world had a self-seeking liberality, but not a self-denying charity. The early Church stood by the death-bed of the old world, ministering comfort and consolation amid incredible poverty and distress; and she stood by the cradle of the new world, and gave it the germs of its best civilisation. This splendid outburst of spontaneous ministering love created all the humanity that is now in the world.

The argument as developed by these four writers is overwhelming. We survey it with a feeling of complete triumph. History, rightly interpreted, is a hymn of praise to Christ. Heat is not more an effect of the sun than modern humanity is an effect of Christ. It is very surprising

how few hints of genuine humanity are found in all Heathendom. 'What is given to the poor is lost,' was the common belief of antiquity. It was a bad omen merely to meet a beggar. The classics contain very few notices of childhood, and Ruskin says that there are no figures of children in ancient works of art. 'Mankind is a word that never passed the lips of Socrates, Plato, or Aristotle.'¹ *Humanitas*, before Christ, meant chiefly human nature or refined culture. Christianity alone has breathed into it its present meaning. There was no Greek or Latin word for 'charity' before Christ. Athens alone had reared a solitary altar to Pity, Christ raised an altar to pity in every human heart. Thus 'civilisation is only a secular name for Christianity.'² The principles of humanity which are axioms with us were not even problems or questions with the sages; they were not within the compass of their ideas or dreams. We do no wrong to Heathendom when we offer Socrates as its best representative of humanity. Jesus gave the modern world its idea of humanity—the very idea of it was all His own. He made the idea a fact in His life, and the fact preceded and originated the idea in the minds of men; He also made the idea an ideal, a world-wide duty, and a living power, which has brooded over mankind with creative warmth, and has won over to its side, intellectually at least, every civilised man in the world. The student of humanity who patiently places side by side the Galilean Peasant and the Athenian Sage has before him one of the most striking contrasts in the history of thought. *Vicisti Galileæ*: O Galilean, Thou hast conquered!

¹ Müller's *Chips*, vol. ii. p. 5.

² Farrar's *Witness of History to Christ*, pp. 147, 148, 174.



PLATO.

III.

PLATO THE PROPHET OF HEATHENDOM.

[The materials for this chapter are mainly taken from Jowett's *Plato*, Collins' *Plato in Ancient Classics for English Readers*, Grote's *Plato and other Companions of Socrates*, and Ferrier's *Lectures on Greek Philosophy* (3rd Edition).]



PLATO illustrates the saying that 'great geniuses have the shortest biographies,' for his personal history is shrouded in mystery. The son of Ariston and Perictione, he was born at Ægina or Athens about 428 B.C. His proper name was Aristocles, but he was surnamed Plato, or the *broad*, because—so it is said—he was broad-browed or broad-shouldered. He was of a noble family, and had the best education of his day, that he might reach the Grecian ideal of a fair mind in a fair body. He probably did duty as a soldier in days of terror and revolution. In his twentieth year he retired from public life, and gave himself wholly to study under Socrates. He was twenty-eight years of age when Socrates died. He endeavoured, but without success, to keep up his master's school. He then spent several years in travelling, chiefly in Egypt.

It is said that, by selling oil, Plato the trader supported Plato the student. There was then an extensive oil trade in Egypt, for Hosea says (chap. xii. 1), 'Ephraim carrieth oil into Egypt.' Palestine and Greece, being in the same botanical zone, would yield the same oils. We also read that he studied and graduated at On or Heliopolis, the Temple and University City of Egypt. He was thus learned

in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, which Pythagoras declared to be as mighty as the Pyramids. Some have fancied that in the East he gained a knowledge of the Bible, which tinged his philosophy.

Returning to Athens in 386 B.C., he bought a small house and garden, lying about a mile to the west of the city. It was called the Academia, from Academus, its owner (hence our word academy). The spot still bears the old name. It was in the only large grove in the plain of Attica, and on the banks of the roving Cephissus. There amid the sacred olive-trees, 'the plane whispered to the elm,' and the crocus and narcissus flowers bloomed. It was then the favourite retreat of the Athenians, as the Ilissus on the east side is now. A famous gymnasium stood there in Plato's day. Its marble porches or cloisters afforded shade in summer and shelter in winter, and all conveniences for philosophers and gymnastic appliances for athletes. In the clean alleys and shady walks of this grateful retreat, Plato, with his copious hair and aristocratic dress and bearing, was often seen in a circle of young men. Great dandies they were, with scented curls and elegant caps and canes. Aristotle was one of them for many years.

Plato, like Socrates, scorned to receive pay for teaching. He soon rose to great fame. He was invited to visit Dionysius, the tyrant of Sicily, ^{him} he who spread a feast for his flatterer, Damocles, and with a naked, hair-hung sword over his head, taught him the vanity and irony of grandeur amid terror. Dion, the kinsman and prime minister of Dionysius, was an ardent admirer of Plato. Plato's ambition was to mingle the ideal with the real, and be mighty both in words and deeds, and so he eagerly embraced the opportunity of showing the world what a philosopher-king might do under his inspiration. He discoursed at the court on the misery of the vicious man, and the blessedness of temperance and justice. His words fired the soul of Dion, who became a new man, gave up luxurious living, and devoted himself to reforming the people. But Dionysius was stung by Plato's

words, and had him sold as a slave. He was bought back by his friends, and afterwards visited Dionysius the younger, hoping to find him more malleable metal than his iron father. The young tyrant was at first most docile, lived simply, and earnestly studied the *summum bonum*. But Plato was not very judicious, and from over-severity lost his opportunity. In old age he made a second visit to this Dionysius, but the effort ended in utter failure. The tyrant grew into a monster of lust and cruelty, and Dion, one of the grandest men of his day, was shamefully murdered by one of Plato's favourite pupils.

These events darkened Plato's last years. He died in 348 B.C., at the age of eighty-one. His ruling passion remained with him to the last, for death surprised him in the act of composing. On his death-bed he thanked God for three crowning mercies: that He had made him a man, and not a beast; that He had made him a Greek, and not a barbarian; and that he had lived in the days of Socrates (Plutarch says Sophocles), that great luminary of the world.¹ He endowed the Academy with his patrimony.

Though rich in humour and irony, he did not share the fine geniality of Socrates. His prevailing melancholy passed into the Athenian proverb, 'As sad as Plato.' David Livingstone says that he was never afraid of an African who could laugh heartily. Such a test would not have been in favour of Plato, for his faint smile never deepened into a ringing laugh. He was also blamed for an aristocratic hauteur. He was no monk, for he reckoned riches as real blessings, and helpful to virtue. He was never married; philosophy was the only bride of his heart.

In the struggle between the many and the few, the haves and the have-nots, he took the unpopular side. Athens, Thebes, and Sparta were still preying upon each other, and soon to become in turn the easy prey of the Macedonian lion; and no shining rainbow of hope revealed itself in the gathering war-cloud. The fate of Socrates had soured him

¹ Howe (Ball's Edition), p. 1263.

against the rulers, and he likens himself to a man who had fallen among wild beasts. His disgust with politics, which made him seek repose in the bosom of philosophy, is intimated in his sketch of the philosopher: 'He is like one who retires under the shelter of a wall in the storm of dust and sleet which the driving wind hurries along; and when he sees the rest of men full of wickedness, he is content if only he can live, and be pure from evil and unrighteousness, and depart in peace and goodwill, with bright hopes.' This is perhaps the reason why Carlyle defined him as 'a gentleman very much at ease in Zion.' He had more admirers than friends, for, as Grote shows, he had a weakness for supremacy, was a little spiteful towards rivals, and obliquely praised himself by disparaging all other teachers. In this he was imitated by his great pupil, Aristotle, who, as Bacon says, like an Eastern despot, strangled his rivals that he might reign peaceably.

He was not, like his master, a cross-examiner of men and a despiser of books. He did his utmost to commit his thoughts to writing. He is usually deemed the best writer of what Gibbon calls that 'musical and prolific language that gives a soul to the objects of sense, and a body to the abstractions of philosophy.' The Greeks themselves said that 'if Jove should descend to the earth, he would speak in the style of Plato.' In language he is a true artist, and some of his sentences are sculptured like a Grecian statue. He somewhere says that one of the most rapturous spectacles would be a soul and body equally beautiful; and such, says a modern admirer, are his Dialogues, of which thirty-five have come down to us. He is often called the poet-philosopher, as his works are equally distinguished by imagination and reason. He is also a fine story-teller and master of illustration. His images, though borrowed from homely objects, are original and splendid. He also adventures into the land of shadows and of the unknown, and grapples with the most mysterious subjects. He gives great attention to distinctions and definitions. By the union of these widely

different qualities he gives both definiteness and lustre to his spiritual conceptions. 'He shall be as a god to me who can rightly divide and define,' is one of his sayings. The man who cannot define he likens to a bungling carver painfully hacking a fowl. The man who 'handles an idea as a butcher handles an ox,' would have been to him one of the most shocking of monsters. His works have been as a Bible to myriads of thinkers. He is both a 'dynamic' and a 'didactic' writer, and has added vastly to 'the literature of knowledge' and 'the literature of power.' Cicero called him the god of philosophers, and Jowett defines him as 'the poet or maker of ideas, satisfying the wants of his own age, and providing the instruments of thought for future generations.' He has also been truly styled 'a terrible destroyer of originalities.' How often when reading modern utterances about poetry and the ideal, the student says to himself, 'Oh, this is another echo of Plato's voice.' When reading him one often feels like the youth who, upon hearing a play of Shakespeare in the theatre, exclaimed, 'That is just a string of everyday quotations.' As Plato in his Dialogues usually speaks through Socrates, the two are, as Emerson says, 'the double star which the most powerful instruments will not entirely separate.' They are what the pillars of Hercules were to ancient mariners: they mark the utmost boundary of pre-Christian thought. Theirs is the most influential philosophy of ancient or modern times. That this was also the opinion of the ancients is proved by the oft-quoted proverb, '*Amicus Plato, Amicus Socrates, sed magis amica veritas.*' I love Plato, I love Socrates, but I love truth more.

Plato was a many-minded man who ranged over nearly the whole empire of knowledge. He has theories about the origin of the world, which are nearly as astonishing as the Hindu Cosmogonies. But our aim is to discover his highest thoughts about God and man. It is difficult to disengage his own views from those of the speakers in his Dialogues. Then his philosophical life covers about half a century, and

his views were often modified, and in some cases entirely changed. Grote and Lewes contend that it is impossible to make out what Platonism is, and they certainly prove that in some essential points he flatly contradicts himself. Lewes, with evident joy, acts the part of *devil's advocate* against Plato. He declares that Plato presents an astonishing combination of 'noble thoughts and nonsense, sharp-sightedness and silliness;' and thinks he is chiefly useful as a wrecked ship to warn men away from the subjective method. We may, however, justly regard Platonism as the greatest event, apart from Christianity, in the history of thought. For the sake of brevity and clearness, I shall arrange its teachings under a few heads.

1. **God.**—Concerning God, Plato repeats the creed of Socrates. He believes in one supreme God, whom he describes as Father, eternal, just, benevolent, and desiring the good of all men. He expects all men instinctively to feel the force of the argument from design. He believes that a healthy-minded man, looking abroad upon the world, will be filled with wonder, and exclaim, 'There are gods, and such great things are their works.' He believes in a particular providence, and in a sort of inspiration, and generally makes God the beginning, measure, and end of all things. The Deity, he says, rejoiced when He had made the world and given it its first motion.

Yet he does not reach the pure and complete idea of a creator and of creation out of nothing: for 'the world by wisdom knew not God' as creator. 'The notion of absolute creation,' says Brandis, 'is unknown to Plato, as it is to all Grecian and Roman antiquity.' And Naville says,¹ 'Monotheism in a pure state, and as a doctrine generally taught, does not exist in the world save under the influence of Christian preaching.' No writer ever announced bolder or more original ideas than Moses when, in the opening words of the Bible, he declared that the world had a beginning, but that its Maker had none, and that He had given being to

¹ *The Christ*, p. 30.

that which before 'was not. In the *Timæus*, Plato gives the fullest account of his theory of creation. He takes for granted an eternal matter or chaos upon which God works, and eternal ideas or models (apparently independent), according to which He works. That co-eternal matter—*hyle*—is somehow bad and intractable. It is a blind nature-power which resists the moulding spirit and is the source of all the evil in the world, which, he sorrowfully confesses, is vastly greater than the good. As he can imagine no origin of evil, he makes it eternal; and he frees God from the responsibility of it by throwing all the blame on the stubborn, eternal substance. Matter with him is the rude instrument, but not the creation of spirit. He thus failed to discover in the universe only a single force obeying a single will. God's relation to the world is that merely of a workman to his work, a thinker to his thought, an agent to his act. God is only the Architect, Constructor, and Governor of the world. He sometimes shows a pantheistic vein, and confounds God with the world. Like all the other sages, he never firmly grasped the idea of the personality of God and the personality of man.

Now and again he represents the world as a divine animal, and speaks of the world-soul. He even describes primæval chaos as a person or stiff-necked animal, which might be coaxed, but not coerced. He makes God the creator of good only, but hampered by some superior force, and thus the All-merciful, but not the All-mighty. He sometimes seems to make iron Fate a god above God.

His theory of good and evil is known by the name of Dualism, which holds that here are two original uncreated rival principles or persons, between whom there is an eternal strife. This theory has always prevailed in the East, and, as all students of history know to their sorrow, it greatly harassed the infancy of the Church. It was very hard for the early Christian thinkers to grasp the pure idea of a Creator, and throw overboard the Platonic impersonal *hyle*. Nor has it been without adherents in recent times. Hume and the Mills (father and son) were attracted by it, as

giving a plausible account of the strange mixture of good and evil in the world.¹ Thus J. S. Mill grants the omniscience and benevolence, but denies the omnipotence of God. It was embraced by Augustine, who with difficulty escaped from it by discovering man's individuality and the freedom of the created will, though, at the best, the enigma is for us only half solved. But it never occurred to heathen thinkers that man derives his being but achieves his sin, being a free-willed creature, and a real though a subordinate creator in the moral sphere. Thus the ultimate mysteries of good and evil were to them, not opposites, but hopeless contradictions.

Through nature-forces and erroneous myths, Plato struggled hopefully toward, though he did not attain unto, a clear and full apprehension of one supreme personal God. It would seem that unassisted reason cannot rise to this height. His theology, however, made a convert of his heart. 'How can any man,' he asks, 'be less than indignantly fervid, if he has to plead for the reality of Divine existence?' He teaches that all men should adoringly worship and gladly obey God, and he tells us that he prayed every morning and evening, and concluded every set meal with a prayer or hymn.

2. **Man.**—Plato strives to understand man, his whence and whither and relations to the eternal. He teaches that there is some divine original stuff in man's nature, and that the soul of man, before its birth, lived with God, face to face with eternal realities, and enjoying perfect purity and blessedness. It thus received impressions as deep, correct, and clearly cut as the seal makes upon the yielding wax. The heart thus retains a loving but confused memory of its fatherland. In our first estate our mind knew truth not at second hand but at first hand, not by Representation but by Presentation. But in this poor world the soul has received some mysterious injury, yet its impressions of truth, though overlaid, are not utterly destroyed.² Like

¹ *Autobiography of J. S. Mill*, p. 40, and often in his *Essays*.

² Müller, in his book on *Original Sin*, teaches Plato's doctrine of a pre-existent state, but believes that man fell before his birth.

moss-covered inscriptions, like the royal superscription upon the battered coin, they may with patience be relieved and read off. Elizabeth B. Browning (vol. v. p. 30) writes platonically—

Let who says
The soul's a clean white paper, rather say,
A palimpsest, a prophet's holograph,
Defiled, erased, and covered by a monk's.
 poring on which
 we may discern perhaps
Some fair, fine trace of what was written once,
Some upstroke of an alpha and omega,
Expressing the old Scripture.

Knowledge and virtue, he believes, spring from reminiscence, and our highest attainment is not cognition but recognition (not *kennen* but *erkennen*). On earth the soul needs only to recall what it learnt in its former state.¹ The old echoes still linger in us, we still retain wavering visions of heavenly beauty, broken memories, half-truths, confused recollections, which are like some charming song of our childhood that we cannot recall, though we readily recognise it when sung by another. Hence true knowledge is not brought to but drawn out of us, and the years bring the lover of wisdom a slow remembrance of the glories of the heavenly kingdom. Shairp and Emerson, in almost the very same words, declare that Wordsworth's *Ode on Immortality* marks the highest limit which the tide of poetic inspiration has reached in England since the days of Milton. Most of the ideas in that ode are Plato's.

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting,
Not in entire forgetfulness
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home.

¹ It has been ingeniously suggested that the doctrine of a pre-existent state originated in that curious trick of memory noticed by psychologists, by which we sometimes feel sure that our present sensations have been experienced by us before, though we know not how or when.

'Tis Plato's settled belief that—

Though inland far we be,
Our souls have sight of that immortal sea
Which brought us hither;
Can in a moment travel thither—
And see the children sport upon the shore,
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.

Plato teaches not the progressive development but the degeneration of man. He speaks of 'a most ancient people, men better than we, and dwelling nigher to the gods.' In *The Statesman* he represents in a figure man's original state of innocence, his fall, a subsequent and deeper decline, and his restoration. The old bachelor says severely, 'Of all animals the boy is the most unmanageable. He is the most insidious, sharp-witted, and insubordinate.' Heathen writers avoid or scorn the subject of sin, in the spirit of Celsus, who reproached Christianity with being 'a poor sin-religion.'

But Plato's earnest mind is drawn to this theme. Believing God to be the author of good only, he seeks the last origin of evil in the co-eternal perverse matter, that dark something, the poor stuff upon which the Constructor had to work. He thus inclines to the idea that evil is a substance, and external to man. The created deities and the unreasoning body, that 'grave of the soul,' are also causes of evil. He thus laid the philosophical foundation for Asceticism and Monkery. As he does not make plain the difference between physical evil and the morally bad, the proper idea of sin is strange to him. Nor does he suspect 'the moral uses of dark things,' or that natural evils may be turned into moral goods. He usually describes sin as disobedience to our higher nature, a corruption of what is noblest, a missing of the mark, a scar on the soul, a marring of manly beauty, finiteness, limitation, emptiness, ignorance, a jarring of the soul's music, a disease which makes the soul weak and ugly, and robs it of joy here and bliss hereafter. He has no abiding conception of obligation to law or of guilt. Yet he says, 'The blame is his who chooses, and God is

blameless.' He teaches that 'the bad is related to the soul, not as the rust to the iron, which it corrodes, but as the slime and sand which cover a shell in the sea, and may be easily removed.'

Though sin with him is little more than an error or misfortune, it is not limited to solitary acts, but consists in the nature and disposition of the soul. Hence humility, which the ancients scorned as a slavish self-abasement, is with him a mark of a pious temper. As regards sin, Plato has occupied the whole region of thought lying between the Bible and Agnosticism. I have listened to a conversation with a thoughtful man who was anxious to borrow nothing from the Bible. He was asked to state his ideas about sin, and repeated the phrases of Plato without knowing that he did so. He who ponders sin, and is not a stark Atheist, has his choice of two teachers, and of two only—Paul and Plato.

Plato believes that man, or at least the philosopher, is salvable. 'Platonism,' says Ackerman, 'has a saving purpose, Christianity a saving power.' Plato enlists our deepest sympathies as he describes man's chief end or summit-good in Bible-like phrases. 'Virtue,' he says, 'is likeness to God.' 'The virtuous are God's friends and children.' 'Honour the soul, as being second only to the gods; and the best way of honouring it is to make it better.' 'We are to escape from evil by leading the life of the gods.' Philosophy is a 'meditation on death,' and its aim is to bring man back from the body to the soul. He makes virtue 'the balance and harmony of the various powers of the soul.' This thought has taken hold of the world. Bishop Butler reproduced it. Dr. Arnold, of Rugby, adopted both the idea and phrase of Plato when he said that his leading aim was to *sophronise* his boys. Matthew Arnold's 'sweet reasonableness' seems to be a paraphrase of Plato's *sophrosune*.

With Plato virtue is the health and true life of the soul, and its own reward. He calls reason 'the shepherd of the soul.' He holds that the wise man will strive to keep the

soul in tune and harmony, like a well-tuned harp, that he will attain to complete self-mastery or self-government, and that conscience will rule while all the rest of his nature obeys. He breathes a noble scorn of sensuality and vulgar worldliness. He is confident that the 'love of wisdom' will secure the 'wisdom of love,' emancipate the soul and mould the life. In his best moods he is no Pelagian, for at the close of the *Menon* he says, 'Virtue is not natural to man, neither is it to be learned, but it comes to us by a divine influence. Virtue is the gift of God in those who possess it.'

Lofty as his ideal is, it is only an ideal, for his foundation idea is not duty or obligation, but self-culture or graceful manliness. Still, his teaching had great power over select natures; for the Greek proverb ran, 'Apollo begat Æsculapius to heal the body, and Plato to heal the soul.' Two far-famed illustrations show how he expects men to be converted by the truth. In the *Phædrus* he likens the soul to a charioteer with a pair of winged steeds, the one black and mortal, the other white and immortal. By faith and love the immortal steed is plumed to fly into the higher world, its true home, but the mortal droops her wings and is dragged upon the earth. The one is a noble animal who is guided by word and admonition only, but the other is an ill-looking villain, who will hardly yield to blow and spur. He rushes towards the earth, and a fearful contest ensues. The charioteer uses bit and bridle with all his might, covers the black horse's tongue and jaws with blood, and forces him to rest his haunches upon the ground. Only thus can he be tamed and humbled. Plato writes as if he had many a personal injury to avenge on the villain. The horse of nobler breed, nourished on nectar and ambrosia, turns its head to the pastures of immortal truth and beauty, and strives to check the downward fury of its mate. With such a pair in hand the charioteer is just able to raise his head and catch a glimpse of 'the true Above,' upon which the gods gaze without let or hindrance. This glimpse is granted only to

a few souls out of the many, only to the purest in their purest moments, and it infuses new life into the spirit. But some are carried downwards by the plunging of the unruly horse, or lamed by unskilful driving, and often the wings droop or are broken, and the soul, failing to see the light, sinks to the earth beneath the load of forgetfulness and vice. He thus does equal justice to the individuality and duality of man, and admirably represents the inner discord and self-disunion which conscience reveals, and the difficulty of attaining unto virtue.

In his allegory of the cave he gives us a Bunyan-like picture of conversion. Men who are not lovers of wisdom he likens to dwellers in a deep underground cave. Their backs are to the cave's mouth, and they are so chained from childhood that they cannot turn round. All their light is from a fire behind them. Between them and the fire a wall runs across the cave, and upon that wall puppet showmen exhibit their figures. The fire throws the quivering shadows of these figures upon the cave floor in front of the captives, who mistake the shadows for substances. The cave has also an echo, which is the only sound the captives hear. But the true lover of wisdom has these chains knocked off, and turns to the light of day, which first dazzles and bewilders, and then gladdens him. His weak eyes can bear at first to look upon only the shadows in the water, but soon gather strength, and after enjoying starlight and moonlight, are able, eagle-like, to welcome all the direct splendours of noon. The philosopher would rather be a small cottar on the heath in that land of light than the mightiest monarch in the pale realm of illusions and shows. Thrice blessed is he who has escaped from the firelight and cave-shadows, and walks at liberty amid sunlit realities. He is moved with pity for his companions of the cave, surrounded with the ghosts of their earthly night, and would fain revisit them and make them sharers of his new life. Yet if he did so they would laugh at him, and probably put him to death. He elsewhere says, in one of his strangely-prophetic utter-

ances,¹ 'Thus circumstanced, the just man will be scourged, tortured, bound in chains, have his eyes burnt out, and lastly suffer all manner of evils and be crucified.'

Under Plato's influence such conversions as he here allegorises did take place. I give one historical instance, as narrated by Ferrier. Polemon was notorious for his profligacy and dissipation, but happening one day to enter the Academy with a crowd of gay companions, with whom he had been revelling, he was so much struck with the discourse of Xenocrates (Plato's successor), who was lecturing on the advantages of temperance, that he tore from his head the chaplet of flowers with which he was crowned, and determined then and for ever to renounce his way of life. He continued true to his resolution, and became the most temperate of the temperate, and succeeded Xenocrates as the expounder of Platonism.

As touching the great Hereafter, Plato furnishes a good handbook of Natural Religion. With great confidence he insists on the immortality of the soul, though many of his arguments are vain. Indeed, he comes near claiming two eternities for the soul, the one before and the other after the human birth. He emphasises the close connection between this life and the next, the solemn judgment to come, the unspeakable reward of the righteous, and punishment of the wicked. To the just man death is gain, and his blessedness is described in glowing terms. He cherishes the hope of reunion with the good in the realms of eternal purity.

3. Plato's Ideas.—Plato spent his life in giving an answer to the question, What is Truth? His answer is found in his doctrine of ideas, which is the kernel of Platonism. The historian of ideas cannot go further back than Plato, though it might be too much to say that he was . . .

'The first that ever burst
Into that silent sea.'

No doubt he owed much to previous thinkers.

¹ *Republic*, Book II. chap. iv.

His doctrine of ideas is given chiefly in the *Meno*, the *Phædrus*, and the *Phædo*; and in the *Symposium* he shows the relation of man to these ideas. He starts from his conception of God and man. Man, before his birth into earth, lived with God and shared His ideas, and on earth he should ever strive to regain his long-lost patrimony of truth. Fallen though he be, his spirit is still the intellectual kinsman of God, and can think and feel congenially with the parent mind. At the heart of the universe lie certain eternal realities or laws, and man, in his pre-existent state, knew these. He says that 'every soul of man has, from its very nature, beheld real existences.' His mind, before birth, received impressions, as the seal leaves impressions on the yielding wax. The seal and the original signature, the mould and the medal agree, or rather agreed at first. The difficulty is now to find out exactly what the original signature and medallion were. Truth, however, can yet be discovered. It is a hidden treasure which we must search for methodically, not rushing to and fro, and clutching at it as when one thrusts his arm at a venture into a dovecot to catch a pigeon.

The true method for discovering truth he called Dialectic, and it consisted in self-examination, an inner conference, cross-questioning, and most painstaking definition. He could not believe that our nature is a lie and the author of it a deceiver, and so he descends into man's nature for the starting-point of truth. He occupies himself with intuitions rather than with deductions or derived and educated ideas. He wishes to lead the soul up from the region of the senses to the eternal kingdom of first-truths, where the supreme good is enthroned. He does not concern himself about relative and temporal truths, but longs to behold, without veil or mask, the pure reality of things eternal; for he holds that what does not exist eternally, does not really exist at all.

As we give a man's name to his portrait, Plato gives the name of ideas both to the eternal realities and to the

impressions they left on the mind in the pre-natal life. They are both things and thoughts agreeing with things, both the heavenly realities and the images which they make on the mirror of the mind. Thus, right thinking is the realising of true being. They are the highest truths or laws, above the mind, and apart from the Creator, and eternal in the heavens. They are the perfect patterns or primal types, according to which God works ; and all the good things in the world have been cast in their mould, for the eternal reasons of all true things live in God. The true thinker is the observer not the creator, the discoverer not the inventor of ideas, which are in their last analysis eternal facts. It is the man who knows not the ideas, who wanders aimlessly among dissolving views and a mirage of notions. The thinker does not, by the limelight of a brilliant fancy, throw his ideas upon the screen of the universe ; his highest vision is not 'subjectivity turned outward into an actual objectivity.' He would rather say that ideas make the mind, than say that the mind of man makes ideas. Ideas are the cause rather than the product of thinking. His poetic faculty pictures the ideas as divine persons and efficient causes. He even calls them, figuratively, gods. Usually he teaches that they were created by God, but sometimes he seems to think that they were independent of and above Him.

The highest of them is the idea of the supreme good, which he often seems to identify with God. This idea is the sun of the mind, of which all our virtues are but faint and broken shadows. It is always giving off a self-evidencing, self-proving light. It is the life of life to the true thinker. When clearly known it has irresistible authority, and even a creative and regenerating power. It gives both light and sight to the lover of wisdom ; for, like the sun, it is revealing and life-giving. This highest idea he often calls *the True, the Beautiful, and the Good*. These are not three, but one, with him. The true is placed first, probably as intimating that beauty is the radiant reflection of the inner essence of truth, while goodness is the fruit of it ; thus truth gratifies

our craving both for the beautiful and happiness. He justly believes that the ethic clothes itself in the æsthetic, and that God's world is a cosmos furnished with 'the fair and the fit.' He makes one thing of truth, beauty, and goodness. He does not separate truth and beauty, as Elizabeth Browning does—

Poets die for beauty as martyrs for truth.

Nor does he simply confound them, as Shelley does when he sings—

Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty ; that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

One writer acutely remarks that Plato fails to distinguish between the good and the right ; the good being the character of things, and the right a quality of actions. It is worth while noting that the Greek word oftenest used in the New Testament for the good, and also for the honest, means literally the beautiful. The same idea is under the word *grace*, and its derivatives *graceful*, and *the graces*. Virtue with Plato, as grace with the Christian, is the highest kind of super-sensual beauty. It is the aim of philosophy to unfold the ideas and make all men conscious of them ; for they are among true men the spring of action and mould of character. He who knows them not does not truly live at all, but is the slave of appearances, illusions, and hearsay wisdom. *Rerum ignarus imagine gaudet*. He has opinions, but not truth : he knows not what really is, but only what is seeming and becoming. At the best he never gets beyond the shadows cast by substance.

Plato is no mere dreamer, dwelling in a lofty cloudland of his own creation, and hating the stern realities of everyday life. He is an idealist because he believes in necessary, everlasting, and universal truths, apart from which there could be no reality to the thinker, nor grandeur in human life. He is fully persuaded that man can never reach great things except when inspired and guided by great ideas

which are the last landing-place of all thinking, and contain the sum and substance of knowledge, and kindle and nourish living fires in the soul. 'Oh, give me great ideas!' should, as Plato thinks, be the prayer of every man. For he teaches that in order to know the truth we must love it with a pure, supreme love. The name philosopher, that is, lover of wisdom, implies as much. This is the Platonic love, which has become 'a modern jest,' as expressing the sentimental attachment of a man to a woman whom he cannot or will not marry. With Plato it is very like the love of wisdom commended in the Bible. It is the fullest life of a soul enamoured of universal excellence. It is an inspiration, a passion, a noble madness. *Mania* is his Greek word for it. It is a ravishing vision of the truth, heightened by a sense of mystery; it is 'a fine frenzy,' 'reason-on-fire,' the intensest devotion of the soul to the truth, its one chosen bride. With the poet, he believes that 'we live by admiration,' and so tries to kindle a rapturous admiration,—the *victrix delectatio*—of the divine excellence. This soul-mastering, generous love is the bond of union between man and the truth, between man and God. It purifies and ennobles the soul by fellowship with the eternal. He expects all things from this love, which is his one grace and saving principle. The true adorer of the idea resembles what he realises, shares what he studies, becomes what he beholds, and so grows in likeness to God. *Intelligendo fit illud quod intelligit*, as the schoolmen phrased it. The wings of his soul are nourished by the luminous substance of truth, beauty, and goodness; he soars above the vulgar, sense-bound throng, and rises to the highest life possible to man. To him, as to all the classic sages, the tree of this knowledge is the tree of life; piety and morality are the fruits of right thinking; true philosophy is all religion; and the ideas are the makers of men. The ideas supply the philosopher with a working ideal, which has a prophetic and inspiring power. He only is the true doer who, while toiling wearily in the darksome vale of the actual, lifts his eyes with longing to the sunlit

summits of the ideal. Though ever baffled, he finds that, as Whittier phrases it—

Thus failure wins. The consequence
Of loss becomes its recompense.
And evermore the end shall tell
The unreached Ideal guided well.

4. **Plato's Poetry.**—Plato is a poet and the philosopher of poets. He is a discoverer of new ideas, which he sets forth in rhythmical and charming words, and his philosophy lays the foundations for the poetic interpretation of nature and the poetic representation of truth. Being both poet and sage, he strives to do full justice to Truth and Beauty. He is a firm believer in—

The glorious faculty assigned
To elevate the more than reasoning mind.

Platonism is a mighty tree which springs from a two-lobed seed; the one lobe is the doctrine of ideas, and the other is the essential unity in the world, whereby analogy becomes an interpreter and a guide. As the world is the work of one God, so there is one thought in its various parts, and correspondences unite all things. He finds natural law in the spiritual world, and spiritual law in the natural world, for he beautifully says that 'the laws below are the sisters of the laws above.' He is as great a believer as Swedenborg himself in nature's symbolism, in spiritual senses, and in correspondences. He bids us expect in all things an inner truth and harmony, which the seer discovers and reads off for other men. To him the whole world is crowded and crowned with numberless exquisite resemblances, and with images of what is divine. He thus teaches that you may find 'a tale in everything.' He studies nature with an eye to spiritual suggestions and underlying analogies. Everywhere he sees heaven casting its shadows upon earth, as the clouds do in summer. For him—

The wood, the mountain, and the plain
Wave breast-deep with the poet's grain.

As a pupil of Plato, Milton asks—

What if Earth
Be but the shadow of heaven, and things therein
Each to other like, more than on Earth is thought?

Archbishop Leighton well expresses this feature of Platonism when he says, 'The Platonists divide the world into two, the sensible and the intellectual world; they imagine the one to be the type of the other, and that sensible and spiritual things are stamped, as it were, with the same seal.' Every truth is to him a 'thing of beauty and a joy for ever.' As he lived and moved among ideals, he is the father of those who idealise. No teacher ever had more faith in the educating power of music, under which, he says, the soul becomes gentle and pliable as metal in the fire. He is thus the philosophical tutor of the most thoughtful of the poets, as Milton, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Tennyson. Mrs. Browning, when sick, was urged by her physician to abandon her studies, and, to quiet his importunities, she had an edition of Plato bound so as to resemble a novel.

5. **Plato's Politics.**—His views about the State are explained in *The Republic*, the greatest of his works, and the longest but one. It was written in his old age, to show what kind of a State his philosophy would produce. Its gorgeous images of prosperity and perfection were suggested by the decay of Greece; just as, by the laws of recoil and contraries, the fairy tales of boundless wealth in the *Arabian Nights* sprang out of the intense poverty of Persia. As in the reign of Charles II., Milton solaced himself with visions of Paradise, so in *The Republic* Plato seeks consolation for the incurable sores of Hellas. Agreeably to his philosophy, justice in the State is the same as justice in the citizen. The State is just the man 'writ large.' The idea of the good creates the State in little, that is, man, and the State in great, that is, society. His ideal Republic is a Church rather than a State, and in some respects resembles the Old Testament theocracy. He holds that the ideas he expounds are

the realities of heaven, and should have sovereign sway in every region on earth. In many respects his Republic breathes the loftiest spirit, and displays a passion for influencing men. Strangely enough, he would banish the poets, because they had wrapped up pernicious errors in splendid symbolism. The true king is a lover of wisdom and a perfectly just man, and the guardians of the State are like the good shepherd who sacrifices himself for the sheep. The same subject occupies his pen in *The Laws*, his last and longest work—written in his seventy-fourth year—in which he gives laws for almost every act and relation of social life. But he has now grown more bitter and satirical, and seems to despair of all men and of his own ideals. He believes that the deep-rooted evil in man and the world must be traced to an evil spirit counter-working the divine spirit. He breathes a tone of pathetic lamentation. He is not now sure that his philosophy can reform men. Such an experience is common in the old age of those earnest non-Christian writers in our day who have ideality large. Very much in the spirit of Carlyle, Plato would hand men over to the police. The glowing visions of his youth have faded away, and in despair of truth he grasps at mere tradition and mechanical religion. He recommends a State religion which prescribes faith and worship, and punishes all Nonconformists. He pleads for Acts of Uniformity and a merciless Inquisition, and stoutly resists the rights of conscience and private judgment, in defence of which his master nobly died. In important particulars he renounces the teaching of his earlier years, and shows an intolerance and bigotry not unlike those of the enemies of his Socrates. He would have heretics punished by solitary confinement and death. Grote says that his latest utterances are ‘imbued with the persecuting spirit of mediæval Catholicism,’ and Lewes condemns with greater severity. His sun was not largest at its setting, nor did it ‘glorify the retinue of clouds around it.’ His last words and deeds had none of that well-rounded completeness which has secured unequalled fame for Socrates. Not

in his old age did he realise the poet's conception of the prophet—

Thus, with somewhat of the seer,
Must the moral Pioneer
From the future borrow ;
Clothe the waste with dreams of grain,
And, on midnight's sky of rain,
Paint the golden morrow.

6. The Relation of Platonism to Christianity.—A German, Ackerman, has written an interesting book on *The Christian Element in Plato*. He exaggerates the best side of Plato, and claims that while Christianity has a saving power, Platonism has a saving purpose. Dr. Ramage's *Bible Echoes in Ancient Classics* is interesting in its methods and materials, and catalogues many seeming or real coincidences between Plato and the Bible. We may, however, easily put our meaning into Plato's words, and colour his teaching with hues borrowed from Christianity. Then, as Guizot well says, 'It is the just and happy privilege of genius, that its errors are pregnant with truth.' As Plato's is the 'exquisite surmise outleaping thought,' his vague aspirations and suggestions are larger to us than his statements, and probably larger also than his intentions or his dreams. Some would interpret them as the enraptured musician professes to interpret the secrets and wonderful symphonies of wordless music.

Still, Plato is the Prophet of Heathendom, both as revealing its noblest aspirations and anticipating subsequent thinking. He both sees and foresees. Hence the greatest of the early Church fathers affectionately claimed to be his intellectual kinsmen and disciples, and recommended thoughtful young men to study him. Having learnt his philosophy before their conversion, they did not unlearn it afterwards, for they found that much of it was true and helpful to Christian thought. They held that, like the redeemed Israelites, they should, in forsaking Egypt's idols, bring with them Egypt's gold, which was God's, though it had adorned

the idols. Justin Martyr believed that Plato was indebted to the Bible, while Celsus retorted that Christ had borrowed from Plato. Eusebius of Cæsarea says that Plato 'alone of all the Greeks reached the vestibule of truth, and stood upon its threshold.' Augustine owns that Plato had kindled an 'incredible fire' in his breast, and believes that had Christ been offered to him, he would have embraced Him as the realisation of his ideals and his Redeemer. He thanks God that he became acquainted with Plato, whom he calls his converter. Hence he and others believed that Platonism was divinely fitted and intended to be a bridge to faith. He was a John Baptist to the Greek, they said, a forerunner of Christ. They also held that he was specially enlightened by God, who has never left Himself without a witness, that in his strange words he sometimes spoke, not of himself, but by the Spirit of God, and that his loftiest truths were scattered rays from the Logos, 'the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.' Thomas Aquinas quotes Plato as a witness to Christian truths. The revived interest in his works contributed towards the Reformation. Melanethon counted himself a pupil of Plato, and Calvin calls him the most pious and sober of all the philosophers.

Religious thought in Germany, during the last century, has turned from Rationalism towards revived Christianity under the influence of Platonists. Schleiermacher, one of the leaders of that epoch, was called 'the German Plato.' Plato was 'the idol and watchword' of Neander in his youth. We are told that in recent times Plato has led Christwards many young men in Germany, and at least some English-speaking preachers of our day might be added to the list. Theologians like Jeremy Taylor, John Howe, Archbishop Leighton, and John Hall have been decided Platonists. Especially Howe and Leighton disclose a Platonic turn of mind in their loftiest flights, and Leighton's prayers and appeals have usually both Platonic ideas and expressions. Henry Rogers says that John Howe's mind kindled with an intense, Plato-like rapture. He discovers 'in almost every page' (of Howe's

writings) 'traces of his ardent admiration of Plato, and proofs that it was the admiration of a kindred mind.' Howe calls Plato 'the great pagan theologian,' and always regarded him as his chief uninspired favourite among the Greek writers. Coleridge speaks of Plato's ideas 'as a plank from the wreck of paradise.' 'Plato! thou reasonest well!' is not the exclamation of Christian thinkers only. Mr. Mill the elder said that he was more indebted to Plato for his mental culture than to any other author. Hegel and his school claim to have perfected Plato's teaching, and they certainly make it perfectly unintelligible, so that it confounds and paralyses the mind that strives to grasp it. We have thus the highest authorities for regarding Plato as the greatest spiritual teacher of Heathendom. Let us now place him alongside of Christ. The contrast at once recalls Plato's many waverings and contradictions, his many puerilities and superstitions, and his vanishing faith in his own principles in old age. He gives us many a splendid fragment, many a beautiful torso, but not a living harmonious unity. He often fraternises with the popular idolatry notwithstanding its herd of deities. Some of his teachings startle and shock us. He would teach men that they are earth-born and sprung from their native soil. He recommends useful frauds and lies. The text-books of his model republic are to teach, as true, myths and fictions which the teacher knows to be false. He does not insist on duty and the right. He has no precise word for sin, which he seems to confound with physical evil. He slights the heart and over-estimates the head, believing that intellect is 'the king of heaven and earth.' He forbids grief for the death of beloved relatives. He shows the customary Greek contempt for all who are not Greeks. He would destroy both individuality and family life, and pleads for a community of wives. The magistrates, in fixing the relations of fathers and mothers, are to act simply as skilful breeders. No child is to know his own mother, no mother her own child. The officers are to take new-born children to the pen or fold, as he calls it, but to destroy the puny, the

deformed, and the unsound in mind. He divides his model city into three classes, or rather castes. The rulers are as gold, the guardians as silver, and the rest as brass and iron. The soldiers or guardians are to be like generous dogs, kind to their masters and ferocious to strangers. He has no touch of that bleeding, yearning sympathy with the masses, no grain of that undying hopefulness regarding them, which Christ has taught us.¹

Plato shows no hearty interest in the elevation of woman. He believes that something is radically wanting in the soul of the slave, and would leave him without any training. His ideal State has no room for the poor or the sick. They are as 'flocks' and 'herds.' The toiler is of no value beyond his power to do his handiwork. He speaks of the beggar as a sort of animal: so very far is he from holding no man cheap or vile, common or unclean. His philosophy is a privilege for the few, not an inheritance for all; his salvation is aristocratic. He preaches a caste religion, never dreaming of a spiritual democracy, or, to borrow a new phrase, a theodemocracy. None but the dialecticians, the definers, the geniuses, the students, who can give themselves wholly to the contemplation of ideas can be men of virtue. He honours Hellenic rather than human nature.

His system, with all its sublime imaginings, sadly lacks definiteness, simplicity, authority, and creative power. Very touching is the conversation in the *Phædo* about immortality. Phædo, a pupil of long standing, is afraid that the soul of Socrates may vanish into air, especially if a strong wind be blowing at the time of his death, that the body may survive the soul, as a coat the wearer, and that the soul may be as an invisible harmony which does not survive the breaking of the

¹ But some of his modern admirers go even further in this direction than he does. For example, Fichte scorns those who are not participators in the idea as 'the herd,' 'labourers and hodmen;' and Emerson, in his Introduction to *Representative Men*, says, 'Enormous populations, if they be beggars, are disgusting, like moving cheese, like hills of ants or fleas; the more the worse.'

lyre. One of Cicero's speakers expresses what was probably a common feeling, when he owned that, with the writings of Plato before him, he could believe in his immortality; but when he closed the book the reasonings lost their power, and the spirit world grew pale and unreal. Then Plato's crowning conception is a thought or a thing, 'the beautiful and the good;' it is not *He* but *it*; that is, truth, not One who is the truth; it is a shining abstraction, not our Father in heaven revealed through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The marvellous contrast between Christ and Plato can scarcely be better stated than in the words of Rousseau: 'The precepts of Plato are often very sublime; but how greatly does he not sometimes err, and how far do his errors reach! As for Cicero, can we believe that without Plato this orator could have attained to his offices? The Gospel alone is, as to its morality, always pure, always true, always unique, always like itself.' Christ's simplest facts put Plato's loftiest ideas to shame. Christ's attainments excel all Plato's conceptions.

A Modern Platonist.—I shall now essay the sketch of a young modern truth-seeker, who has not accepted the Christian faith, but has surrendered himself to the influence of Plato. There are probably some such in our land, and many educated young men in India are in a similar position.

Our young Platonist cannot be a sensualist. He deems it the utmost degradation to be among the bemired hogs of Circe, or the jovial, faun-like worshippers of Venus and Bacchus. As for him, the Sirens sing their sweetest in vain, for the music of heaven has charmed and claimed him. He has endorsed the grandest protest against the flesh in Heathendom, and breathes a prophet-like scorn of the blinding vanities of excess and worldliness. He cannot be of the earth, earthy; for, like his master in Raphael's picture of the School of Athens, his heart and eye are on high amid the greatest things of God and man. Can his bent be prone, as if his chief attractions were here below?

He moves through life attended by a splendid vision which rebukes all animalism. He believes that he is no man who has not mastered all sensual desires. He reverences himself and his own nature, and believes in the supremacy of the soul. He feels deeply stirred by his master's appeals to the chivalry of a free and noble mind. With a touch of pride and scorn, it must be owned, he looks down upon the sense-loving throng, who are well content with this prison-house of the flesh, and have never tasted the high pleasures of the soul. He is not one of your Materialists or Utilitarians. He exults in all the discoveries of physical science, and is thankful for the boon of living in an age when the horizon of knowledge is widening on every side. But he does not expect physical science to solve any of the great problems of the soul, for his master has shown him the wide gulf between physiology and psychology. You will never persuade him that you can make the mind out of the senses. He does not bow the knee before the idols of second causes and material progress. He does not join the vulgar hero-worship of earthly success. He is none of 'earth's fat ones,' who eat, but worship not. The visible world seems small to him, only the unseen has grandeur. He cherishes a passion for eternal realities, craves a larger discourse of reason than physics allow, and would breathe the ampler and diviner air of the ideal.

It goes without saying that he believes in real supernaturals. Amid the near, rude, stunning voices of earth, he always hears 'the mighty waters rolling evermore.' He is attracted to 'the over-realm' and 'the over-soul.' And he is no Agnostic. He is a firm believer in an unseen world of truth, beauty, and goodness, to which he of right belongs, though he has fallen from it, and after the patterns of which he aspires to live. He cherishes a deathless hope of the discovery of truth and the attainment of virtue. Like young Augustine, when studying Plato, his heart is filled with an indescribable longing after the goods of the soul. He will hardly be like Nathanael Carpenter, an Oxford Fellow, of

whose dying regrets Anthony Wood reports: 'It did much repent him that he had formerly so much courted the maid (philosophy) instead of the mistress, to the neglect of divinity.' For his philosophy is all religion, and its one aim is to bring man into harmony with God, and prepare him for death, after which he shall dwell in heaven, with God and the just of all ages.

Moreover, our hypothetical Platonist has none of that keen and often bitter antagonism to Christianity, none of that confirmed self-sufficiency which we find in modern non-Christian thinkers; and this is an essential point. He finds that the ante-Christian is not anti-Christian, but that, on the contrary, the master-current in Plato is distinctly Christwards. He is under the guidance of a system which, to quote Neander, 'appeals more directly than any other ancient system to man's deep spiritual instincts,' and which consciously fails to satisfy these instincts, and most frankly owns its failure. For 'the soul,' as Plato says in *The Banquet*, 'desires what is sovereignly beautiful without possessing itself what it pursues.' 'Light, more light,' is thus his daily prayer; and the master-bias of Plato takes him in the direction in which truth lies, helping him to conceive of God as a Spirit, and of his duty of living in and for the unseen and the future. For, as Augustine tells us, 'the Platonists in many ways lead to the belief in God and His Word.' The shade of his great master would reproach him if he lapsed into a poor, lettered Epicureanism like that of John Inglesant, who is touched only by what is mystic and sensuous in religion, profoundly tolerant of error and vice when they cause no human suffering, and counts obedience to all existing authorities as the seal of a gentleman.

Thoroughly loyal to the things of the soul, our young Platonist is ready to sell all for the truth which he loves supremely, and which alone can give him soul-repose. And he is withal very reverent, as knowing that he moves amid ineffable and illimitable mysteries. What interests us most


in him is his waiting and expectant attitude. He is like one of the speakers in the *Phædo*, who argues that the truth-seeker should persevere in the search for truth, taking the best of human words to bear him up as on a raft through the stormy waters of life; knowing that his voyage in his frail barque would be perilous, unless he might hope to meet with some securer stay, 'some word from God,' it may be. His soul waits for some god or god-inspired man to guide him into the way of light and peace. The hope of this coming one is the star of his night and the strength of his soul.

We imagine our Platonist when in this mood to read the Gospel of St. John, who represents the Platonic, as St. Paul represents the Aristotelian type of mind. We should naturally expect him to approach the faith, like Augustine, along this avenue, and to be converted first to Christianity and then to Christ. Would it astonish us should the Gospel find in him a welcoming, receptive soul, and should he say, 'Here is the bread of life for which I have hungered, the water of life for which I have long thirsted? Here is an idea which does not retreat from me as I vainly strive to grasp it, but which satisfies my hunger for finished and consummate excellence. Here is the truth that justifies my master's dreams. Is not this the Coming One, the Divine Helper, towards whom, through the twilight, he stretched forth hands of entreaty? Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.'

IV.

EPICETUS THE SAINT OF HEATHENDOM.

[The translations in this chapter are mainly from Long's *Epictetus*, and Capes' *Stoicism*. The writer is most indebted to Dr. Zeller's *The Stoics, Epicureans, and Sceptics*, and Dr. Farrar's *Seekers after God*. Brace's *Gesta Christi* and Lecky's *History of European Morals* are the authorities for the statements about the influence of Stoicism upon subsequent ages.]

PICETUS was born some time in the first half of the first century, at Hierapolis, a town which is mentioned in the Epistle to the Colossians (chap. iv. 13). It was near Colossæ, and is now a deserted ruin on a beautiful plateau overlooking the Meander. We know nothing about his boyhood, but that he was a slave and had poor health. His name is as full of pathetic suggestion as that of Valjean, or Hallo-Jack, the hero of Hugo's *Les Misérables*; for Epictetus is a Greek adjective of depreciation, and means one gotten or acquired, that is, a living chattel: a fitting name for an utterly forlorn boy, who had been exchanged perhaps for a dog or some trifle, or flung into the bargain to some large purchaser, or knocked down for a few pence after the sack of a Phrygian town. His very namelessness is a history, and recalls to us a better-known slave from the same quarter, Onesimus, whose name means useful or handy, a thing for an owner.

Without lineage or family ties, this nobody's child belonged to one of the most unfortunate classes the world has seen. Roman slaves were held as no men, as dead men in

the eye of the law, as beasts, as tools that speak ; they had no name, no heirs, were incapable of being injured, might be pawned as other goods, and could call nothing their own but their slavery. The Roman world had no idea whatever of the individuality and sacredness of man as man. They were often branded like sheep with their owner's initials, and were thus spoken of in derision as a 'lettered people.' Many of them served as door-keepers, and were chained as dogs at the door-posts. Mistresses, for the most trifling fault, would tear their faces, and thrust their long brooch-pins into their quivering flesh.

Somehow Epictetus was brought to Rome, just as our yellow-haired ancestors—Angles, who looked like angels—were dragged from their well-beloved valleys to Rome, and forced to drudge for their haughty conquerors. Epaphroditus was his master, and, like Zanthus, the master of Æsop, he owes his fame to his slave. He was an abandoned freedman, and boon companion of the Emperor Nero. One good act is recorded of him, a writer says : 'He helped Nero to kill himself, and for this deed was himself killed in turn by Domitian.' It was then the fashion among rich Romans to educate the cleverest of their slaves, who were employed as tutors, secretaries, physicians, librarians, house-philosophers, or domestic chaplains, though sometimes they were lightly esteemed, and were entrusted with the care of the lady's pet dogs. Their masters made money by hiring out these learned slaves. Some Romans had a living library in the shape of slaves, each of whom could repeat from memory a book of the *Iliad*. Epaphroditus, it is said, was one day beating Epictetus in fury or frolic. 'If you go on, you'll break my leg,' the slave said quietly. The leg was broken, whereupon Epictetus gently added, 'Now I told you that you would break it.' Celsus, in opposing the Christians, quoted this story, and asked, 'Did your Leader, under suffering, ever say anything so noble?' Origen finely replied : 'He did what was still nobler : He kept silence.'

Epictetus was lame from his youth, or perhaps lameness

came to him, as to Œdipus, from having been left to perish as an infant in some lonely spot. Probably his master concluded that as the lame, sickly boy was fit for nothing else he should make a philosopher of him. Epictetus studied under a famed Stoic teacher, C. Musonius Rufus, probably about the time when the Apostle Paul was in the Mamertine prison at Rome. By-and-by he was made a freedman, we know not when or how. He was never married, deeming that in such an evil age it was better for a philosopher to remain single. For many years he taught philosophy at Rome.

By piecing together a few scattered hints, we can still identify his shadowy figure : a little, limping man, with big beard and close-cropped head, a sturdy staff, and a long, coarse cloak which leaves one shoulder bare.¹ Philosophic monk or friar as he is, he is a lover of neatness and cleanliness, for he fears lest he should drive any away from philosophy. His physique is poor, although by 'solar self-culture' 'his body is adorned by the beauty of his soul.' He was well-known and greatly respected, and enjoyed the friendship of the Emperor Hadrian. He had no income beyond the offerings of his admirers, but he lived cheerfully in deepest poverty. We get a glimpse into his one room, for it had no door. It would be very easy to give a complete inventory of his furniture. It consisted of a platter, an oil-flask hanging on the wall, two or three house-idols, and but two or three odds and ends. 'I also lately had an iron lamp,' he tells us, 'placed by the side of my household

¹ The philosopher's gown was very ancient, for Zechariah (chap. xiii. 4) speaks of the 'rough garment' which the Old Testament prophets wore. We have a refined survival of it in the gown which our professors and preachers wear. The early Christian teachers wore a philosopher's gown in order to attract attention and invite people to question them. This, and not the desire 'to save the outer man from criticisim,' is the origin of the habit. Some philosophers, like Justin Martyr, after their conversion, still retained the philosopher's cloak, that they might present Christianity to the educated heathen as the new philosophy from heaven.

gods.' That lamp still shines on the page of history. It was stolen, and he then got an earthen lamp. 'I shall cheat the rogue the next time,' he says, 'for when he comes to steal another lamp, he shall find only an earthen one.' That earthen lamp was bought as a relic for a large sum by a rich, ignorant fellow, whom Lucian satirises as hoping to gain the wisdom along with the lamp of the sage. By-and-by he took in an old woman as housekeeper, because he had adopted a child who had been left to perish by one of his friends.

The Roman emperors suspected, and sometimes persecuted, the Stoics, whose manly dignity and independence could not be conquered by imperial gold, or favour, or power. These Puritans of Rome belonged to a kingdom above Cæsar's, and asserted the rights of conscience, the equality of all men, and the divine right of the wise man to govern. Most of them were Republicans, like Brutus who stabbed the first Cæsar and fought against Augustus at Philippi. Thus the palace instinctively dreaded the porch. The reigning tyrant, though the Cæsar-god, could feel secure only among abject slaves. Vespasian once tried to bribe the Stoic senator, Priscus Helvidius. 'I must say what I think right,' was the reply. 'But if you do I shall put you to death,' retorted Cæsar. 'When did I tell you that I am immortal?' the Stoic coolly answered. 'You will do your part, and I will do mine; it is your part to kill, it is mine to die—but not in fear. Yours to banish me, mine to depart without sorrow.' The believers in such a creed were not sure of their heads under the Cæsars. About 89 A.D. Domitian banished all the philosophers from Rome. Some of them shaved their big beards, and doffed the philosopher's gown; but Epictetus would not yield, and so retired to Nicopolis, in Epirus, the modern Albania. He there opened a school for the teaching of Stoicism. Arrian, afterwards the tutor of Antoninus the Pious, was one of his devoted pupils. He wrote a life of his master, which has been lost, and published his lectures in eight books, of which only four have come

down to us. They form a volume of considerable size. He also compiled an epitome of Epictetus' discourses, which he called the *Enchiridion*, that is, a manual, something in the hand. The Stoics used this little book as their Bible, Catechism, and *Whole Duty of Man*. It was one of the most popular books of antiquity. Epictetus, like Socrates, wrote nothing himself, and Arrian was called 'Xenophon the younger,' as being the Boswell of the great moralist. About the time, place, and manner of Epictetus' death we know nothing for certain. He lived to a great old age, and died some time in the first half of the second century. He united high thinking with humble living, and studied philosophy on a very little oatmeal. He had only one cloak, and slept on the ground; but he declares that no one ever heard him complaining of God or man. The following epitaph was written for, but not by him—

Although by birth a slave, in body lame,
In fortune poor, yet dear to heaven I am.

The Stoics were the best of the classical heathens, and Epictetus was the best of the Stoics, and worthy to be called 'the Saint of Heathendom.' The other two best known Stoics are Seneca and the Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus. Historians like Niebuhr and Neander give a less favourable portrait of them than Dr. Farrar has given in his *Seekers after God*. Not in the palace of Seneca, the millionaire, courtier, and brilliant rhetorician, nor on the throne of Aurelius, one of the saddest of men and a persecutor of the Christians, but in the one-roomed cottage of the slave philosopher, do we find the noblest exhibition of natural virtues.

Epictetus, as a lecturer, seems to have consciously imitated Socrates. He is not a literary genius like Plato. He shuns the mysterious and the imaginative. His style is simple, direct, and enlivened with apt and homely illustrations: such a matter-of-fact style as becomes the man whose chief aim was to be a doer and teacher of everyday duties.

He has a few fundamentals, which are ever on his lips. His lectures soon weary one. As was said of another maxim-maker, 'His sentences are like sabre-cuts: they have succession, but not connection.'

Pedigree of Epictetus.—I shall now rapidly trace the spiritual pedigree of Epictetus. Among the followers of Socrates was Diogenes, who was said to be 'Socrates gone mad.' He taught by acted parables. It was he who went through Athens at noon, with a lighted candle, searching for an honest man. He often remained in his 'tub,'—probably a little hut like an upturned boat—as the crowds were streaming to the theatre, and entered it when they had left. He sometimes walked backwards, and was laughed at. 'You laugh at me,' was his retort, 'for doing what you have been doing all your life long.' When Alexander the Great asked what he could do for him, his surly reply was, 'Don't stand between me and the sunshine.' 'If I were not Alexander, I would be Diogenes,' said the royal visitor, probably perceiving that the sage had already achieved what he wished to achieve, the conquest of the world. This philosophical Ishmaelite, in his measureless egotism, had a savage joy in disgusting people, and in crushing all the finer feelings of his nature. His system was called Cynicism, or Daggism, because it had the spirit of a snarling dog.

About 300 B.C. appeared Zeno, one of the earnest spirits of his time. He rejected the harsher elements of Cynicism which had at first attracted him. With great success he lectured at Athens for forty years, in what was called the *Stoa Poikile*, or Painted Porch, because it was adorned with celebrated frescoes.¹ His followers were thus called Stoics, or they of the Porch, and his system was often called The

¹ Searching in Athens lately for the site of the Stoa, I seemed for a moment to have extraordinary success. About the spot indicated on the plan of the ancient city, which I had in my hand, I found a gaily painted building, upon which I read in enormous Greek letters the words *Stoa Poikile*. I was gazing upon the store of an advertising Athenian Cheap-John.

Porch. Christ, surrounded by His disciples, '*walking in Solomon's porch*,' teaching the multitude, and disputing with the scribes, recalls the image of a sage of Greece or Rome. Zeno strove to teach men the practice of virtue, and so adorned his doctrine by his life that he became the most honoured man in Athens.

Greece was then utterly crushed under the rule of the Macedonian, and the leading Greeks, in despair of political life, sought a sanctuary in Stoicism. The system was expanded by Chrysippus, the greatest of the Stoic writers, who died about 200 B.C. About fifty years later, Stoicism passed from Greece into Rome. Captive Greece led her captors captive, and during the next two or three centuries the best men and women in Rome were Stoics. The Romans were a soldierly, law-making, organising race, and Stoicism was akin to their best qualities. The ruling ideas in Rome were law, duty, order, and government, as in Athens they were beauty and taste. Stoicism suited well a heroic nation, whose favourite god was Mars, who heartily believed in the divine right of strength, who found in the soldier the ideal of the man, and made one thing of virtue and valour. The rival system at Rome was Epicureanism, which had lapsed into a barefaced apology for sensuality. It considered pleasure the chief end of life, and virtue as the enemy of pleasure. Only the sweet was its good. Thus the noblest spirits in Rome were allured to Stoicism. Broken-hearted and despairing of the republic, they sought that within which they could not find without. Cato the younger and Brutus gave respectability to the creed, and many Roman ladies became out-and-out Stoics.

Heathén women before their day had been students, but their representative is not Hypatia, but Aspasia, or Phryne. Among the Roman Stoics was the elder Arria, wife of Cæcina Pætus, who was ordered by Cæsar to put himself to death. She showed her husband how to die, for she plunged the dagger into her own breast, and quietly handed it to her husband with the words, 'See, Pætus, it does not hurt.'

Fannia, the grand-daughter of this Arria, and Paulina, the wife of Seneca, and other matrons, gave lustre to the Stoic cause. Thus Stoicism was the religion of the educated classes in Christ's day, and claimed nearly all the heroic men and women who formed 'the party of virtue' in Rome.

The Environment of Epictetus.—Modern scholarship has photographed for us the life of classical Rome, almost as vividly as modern art has photographed the Romans whose bodies have been recently discovered among the ruins of Pompeii. Epictetus and the infancy of Christ's Church had the same environment. Politically, it embraced the mightiest and, in some respects, worst despotism which the world has seen. The Cæsars really held the globe in their hands; the Emperor was almost the Empire. The liberties, properties, and lives of about 200 millions were at his disposal. History gibbets the most of the Cæsars as men whose cruelty and depravity baffle modern belief, and who serve to show how mean and vile man may become. The Cæsar often seemed to the early Christians to be the veritable Anti-Christ. Yet all the Cæsars were worshipped during their lifetime. 'Nero,' Gibbon says, 'was a priest, an atheist, and a god;' and another defines him as 'a piece of dirt soaked in blood'! 'I think I am becoming a god,' was the sneer of the dying Vespasian. We are all familiar with the scowl on the face of the Cæsars, revealing the sated sensualist. Military glory was the passion of the age, and the heroes of mankind were not their benefactors, but their destroyers. The highest fame was won by the most successful world-waster, whom no principle

Forbade to wade through slaughter to a throne,
And shut the gates of mercy to mankind.

Væ victis: nothing was left for the conquered but death or slavery. Had not the gods themselves set the example of the stronger oppressing the weaker? Tacitus tells us that 'virtue was a sentence of death.' To fear nothing and hope for nothing was then the highest attainment. Each Cæsar,

as with the Sultans, began his reign like the colonist, who first clears a space for himself with his axe. 'In the families of kings,' Plutarch quietly remarks, 'nothing is more common than the murder of sons, wives, and mothers. As for the killing of brothers, like a postulate in geometry, it was considered as indisputably necessary to the safety of the reigning prince.'

The Cæsars were called in derision theatrical tyrants. Often one entered and made his exit as quickly as if he had been only acting a part upon the stage. About nine-tenths of the members of the imperial families were murdered by their nearest relatives. In little more than a century, the whole race of the Cæsars perished, in spite of frequent adoptions and inter-marriages with three other noble families, and notwithstanding the frequent marriages of each of the Cæsars.¹ Professional poisoners abounded in aristocratic circles, and the Emperor had a Taster (*Prægustator*), who tasted each dish before it reached the royal lips, to ascertain whether it were poisoned. This custom still survives, or lately survived, in the Pope's palace.

Social Condition of Rome.—Rome was then probably about half as large as London, and nearly the half of its population were slaves. It was the *ne plus ultra* of social degradation, though resplendent with gold and marble, and 'it seemed as if another sun had arisen on the earth.' Juvenal declared that posterity could not possibly surpass that age in evil manners, as every vice then stood at its topmost summit. Rome was then 'simply on fire of hell.' It had attracted the vices of the world, and turned them into the manners of the capital. The rabble had a cry which summed up all their wishes—*panem et circenses*, bread and circus games. Slavery developed all its most hideous evils. The children of the poor and the female or sickly children of the rich were often exposed to wild beasts. The sages countenanced these practices. Even Seneca says that it is not wrath but reason that makes men drown sickly children.

¹ See Smith's *Universal History*, vol. iii. p. 431.

These foundlings were sometimes devoured by dogs, or rescued by strangers and trained for the worst purposes. Some of them were maimed that they might be exhibited by villainous beggars, and sometimes witches used parts of their bodies for incantations.¹

Divorce was so easy and common that, as in Mahometan countries, some women had more than one husband per annum. They wore the most indecent objects as ornaments, and the royal ladies were the worst of all. The walls, doors, and vessels in the recovered houses of Pompeii show that the Romans had none of that æsthetic sensuality which has the cunning to take from vice all its visible grossness. The family instinct had died out, and the number of free-born citizens was diminishing at an alarming rate, even though special taxes were laid on unmarried and childless men, and special privileges were given to children born in wedlock. Niebuhr tells us that respectable men made it a point of conscience not to marry. They found a more estimable and faithful partner in one of their own slaves than in a Roman lady of high birth. Men and women sought excitement in gigantic, unnatural, and novel crimes, for which the 'pure English' has no phrases, and which are described 'with modest reticence' in the first chapter of the *Epistle to the Romans*.

Cruelty went hand in hand with lust. Rich men sometimes enlivened their private banquets by gladiatorial combats. As they sipped their wine warm human blood was flowing under their eyes, slaves entered, and, sticking their hooks into the corpses, dragged them out of sight, while others sanded the blood-stained floor for the lascivious dances of courtesans. The Emperor Caligula kept expert swordsmen, who amused his guests at the table by the dexterity with which they beheaded prisoners brought in from the dungeons for the purpose. The guest of one Flaminius chanced to say that he had never seen a man die. The host at once had a slave put to death on the spot for the entertainment of the visitor.

¹ Brace's *Gesta Christi*, p. 73.

The Colosseum was the most popular institution of the period, as it is now the greatest ruin in the world. It seated 87,000 spectators, and set the fashions to the provinces, as about 120 buildings of the same style were erected in Europe alone. The public spectacles in these buildings formed one half of the life of rich and poor. All the wealth, beauty, fashion, religion, and learning of Rome flocked thither to feast their eyes with the death-agonies of their fellow-men. A delicate young lady gave the signal for the commencement of the massacre; young ladies of the chief families yelled with savage delight, waved their hands and handkerchiefs, and urged on the ruffians to bloodshed. Even women had to fight there to death as gladiators. Two aqueducts were scarcely sufficient to drain off the human blood. Now that the cellars of the Colosseum have been cleared out, you may see the dens from which the lions and tigers rushed to mangle the bodies of the Christian martyrs. Trajan once forced 10,000 men to fight in Rome, and the sport lasted 123 days. In the year A.D. 53, a canal was opened with imperial pomp. Two fleets of fifty sail each were manned with 19,000 slaves and criminals, who slaughtered each other for the amusement of the spectators, among whom was the elder Pliny.

The Rome of that day shows mankind what a world without faith would become. Its rich culture created worse cruelties than the most savage cannibalism has ever dreamt of. 'The splendour of the ancient world,' to quote Uhlhorn, 'was about to end in a witches' sabbath.' Its sickening history helps us to estimate the moral victories of Epictetus and the progress our poor world has made since his day.

Religious Condition of Rome.—In respect of religion, Rome had adopted and corrupted nearly all the superstitions of the world, and was eagerly seeking for more. The compound was a bewildering chaos, and Pilate's sneering or despairing question, 'What is truth?' represented the prevailing tone of the Roman mind. Many went the round of all religions and sank down exhausted at the gates of

eternity. Disgust and despair cleared the ground for the new religion. New gods were springing up like fungi on a rotten tree, and the atmosphere was tainted by a poisonous marsh formed by decaying religions. The national official religion was dead, and its priests were utter sceptics, who could not help laughing at each other when they met in the streets. They worshipped as gods those whom they must have despised as men, and the worst scorners of the gods were those nearest their altars. Men never prayed to the gods for moral good; their whole religion was magical and mechanical, and their great aim was to bribe the gods. Their religion had in it no seed-corn of virtue. The most honoured service used to be that of the Vestal Virgins, and maidens could not be induced to accept it, although the Vestal fire was a symbol of the duration of Rome, and probably taught that female purity was the defence of the Eternal City. The people satirised in the theatre the gods they worshipped in the temple. Superstition filled the place faith had left vacant, and swarms of jugglers traded on the morbid curiosity and fears of the people. Nearly every page of Plutarch proves that the greatest minds of the age, not excepting avowed sceptics, lived in a nightmare of vulgar superstitions. Much of the Roman religion was a crime, as Döllinger proves by facts which make one almost ashamed of being a man. The voluntary sacrifice of virtue by women was believed to be an offering acceptable to the gods. Famous shrines were dens of prostitution, and were endowed by the foul hire of the priestesses or temple-courtesans, one thousand of whom belonged to the temple of Venus at Corinth. Diogenes fitly likened the popular religions to foul baths. 'Where shall they be washed,' he asked, 'who wash here?'

Philosophy.—The thinkers of that age were divided between the Stoics, the Epicureans, and the Agnostics, who were then called Pyrrhonists. The watchword of the first was duty, of the second pleasure, of the third negation. The Stoics and Epicureans opposed each other vehemently, though they united against Paul at Athens. Most thinking men

were oppressed with disgust and weariness of life. The more easy-going, like Horace and Virgil, were Epicureans, who strove to make life a joyous pastime between two darknesses; the more earnest, like Tacitus, were sad and scornful; most, like Ovid, were hopeless. The younger Pliny, broken-hearted, cried out, 'Give me some new, grand, strong consolation, such as I have never heard or read. All that I have ever heard or read in my life rises to memory, but my grief is too great.'

On that hard pagan world, disgust
And secret loathing fell;
Deep weariness and sated lust
Made human life a hell.

In such an age Epictetus tried the solemn experiment of one against the wicked world. He devoted his life to such questions as these: What is the true rule of life? How can I rise to complete manhood? How can I help my struggling neighbours? How can I live and die nobly?

The Stoics were men of action rather than of contemplation, who occupied themselves with precepts more than with principles, and with practice more than with either. With them conduct was a good deal more than three-fourths of life. They valued knowledge only as it contributed to morals, holding that men should not live to think, but think to live. Thus Epictetus confines himself to everyday matters. He has no patience with theorists who parade learning. He reminds them that sheep do not vomit up the grass and show their shepherds how much they have eaten, but they digest the grass and produce wool and milk.

The Creed of Epictetus.—The whole system of Epictetus is deeply religious, for he bases everything upon his conception of God. But he does not speculate about the nature of God, nor range into the mysteries lying around moral ideas. He freely criticises, but does not formally renounce the popular idolatries, for the Stoics worshipped along with the people in the idol-temples. Though often bewildered in his thought, he usually speaks of one supreme

personal god, whom he calls Zeus. He teaches that there is a multitude of secondary gods, and allows the worship of heroes and demons. He shares the vulgar superstitions, for he believes that God gives signs of His will by birds and the entrails of animals. He agrees with the Stoic theology, which was pantheistic or materialistic, though he usually adopts deistic modes of speech. Ether, fire, atmospheric current, a power inherent in all things, the soul, mind, or reason of the world, the uniting whole, the universal law, destiny, providence, the highest cause, Zeus,—all these are Stoic names for God. Matter and force are the two ultimate principles: that which is acted upon is matter, that which acts is Force, which is an all-pervading breath or creative fire, the one efficient cause, the all-spirit, the soul of the universe. The highest conception is that of Being, or an indefinite some one or some thing, and it includes both what is material and what is not.

All are but parts of one stupendous whole,
Whose body nature is, and God the soul.

All things have proceeded from God, and at the end of a world-period, or cycle, or 'great year,' all things will return to God, and be absorbed by Him, or blent with the original essence, from which they will be evolved in the same form as before. The law is composition and dissolution, renovation and destruction; and gods and men form no exception to it.

These views were borrowed from older thinkers, and are literally reproduced by modern Pantheists. Emerson's oversoul and undersoul are simply phrases for the universal reason and the individual reason of the Stoics. Professor Bain agrees with the Stoic in ascribing to matter the properties of mind. The author of *Ecce Homo*, in his *Natural Religion*, seems to be treading in the very footsteps of Epictetus. To him, as to the Stoic, God and the world are separable in thought, but not separate in fact. He also adores the sceptre instead of the king, and worships law

instead of God, and so offers us the ghost of religion. He will not admit the idea of a god apart from nature and above it; and his piety, which he identifies with admiration, is kindled not by the moral qualities of God, but by the order in nature. The faint after-glimmering (to borrow Carlyle's phrase) of Christianity, has not secured for the modern Englishman a clearer theology than the light of nature gave to the Roman sage. Though puzzled by moral and physical evil, Epictetus urges the argument from design. The beauty and adaptation in the world reveal to him a thinking mind. He sees clearly that God has fitted things to one another, as a skilful workman fits the knife to the case, and the case to the knife. Man is the interpreter as well as the spectator of God's works, and offends reason by denying the benevolent purpose in them. To the sceptics he says, 'Who devised these things?' 'No one,' you reply. 'O amazing shamelessness and stupidity!'

At the time of Christ's birth there were five doctrines about the origin of the universe: polytheism, dualism, pantheism, materialism, and deism.¹ Strange to say, the Stoic seemed to hold all the five. He was a polytheist, for he worshipped idols; a dualist, for he ascribed the origin of the world to an eternal mind and an eternal matter; a pantheist, for, as that word signifies, he taught that God is everything, or that everything is God; a materialist, for he confounded the properties of matter and the attributes of mind; and a deist, for he believed in one supreme God, and all the four other forms of belief in him leant to the side of deism. It is plain that the Stoic's theology was ill-defined, wavering, and contradictory. His god was a Proteus whom the laws of thinking could not grasp, and thus the contradictions in his creed amounted almost to annihilation.

His views about Man.—He teaches that man is sprung from God, who is his Father. Paul at Athens was quoting the Stoic Cleanthes when he said, 'For we also are His offspring.' The words in the Second Epistle of Peter,

¹ Naville's *The Christ*, p. 28.

‘that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature,’ are a Stoic expression, and, as Long thinks, borrowed from the Stoics. They were the first among the heathens who recognised a common humanity, in which even the slave has a share. The dignity of man is the central conception of the Stoic, and pride as opposed to vanity his chief virtue. He calls the soul *to pan hominis*, the all of man, or all the man. Man as to his spirit has kinship with God, though as to his body he has kinship with the animals. This kinship with God is the lever by which he would elevate man, and rouse him to conquer the animal that is in him. He believes in the easy slope that leads to Avernus, but ever appeals to pride and chivalry, and charges men not to dishonour their noble descent, or the nature entrusted to their guardianship. He is always exhorting them to cultivate self-reverence, self-knowledge, and self-control. He vilifies the body as a snail’s prison of flesh and blood; he even blushes because he has a body. But the soul is a part of the Deity, though he also calls it clay finely tempered, and the warm breath in us. The soul is long-lasting, but not everlasting. Chrysippus taught that only the soul of the wise existed till the end of its world-epoch, and that the souls of the evil were annihilated at death. Conscience is the governing part of man, and resides in the breast whence its voice comes, and not from the head—a just remark. The wise man fears most of all this domestic god, who is always with us, and can see in the dark. About the future life he is not as emphatic as Seneca, who calls death the birthday of eternal life, to which he looks forward with joy. Still, he makes the future life the stimulus to a moral life here, and practically appeals as if he held the personal immortality of the soul. He, however, urges the present rewards of virtue rather than a deferred payment beyond the grave.

His views about Morals.—Moral conduct is with Epictetus the whole of life, and the art of virtue is the only great art. To study science without virtue is to be like the suitors of Penelope, who won the maids but not the mistress.

To attend to the worldly welfare of children and neglect their morals, is to be concerned about the shoe, but not about the foot. He cries shame on the musicians who tune their instruments to make them sound harmoniously, while they suffer their lives to be full of discord. He ridicules the rich who have silver vessels and earthenware principles. Duty or virtue is man's end-in-chief, and he who raises pleasure to the throne degrades man. But what is virtue? That which is in harmony with Nature, he replies. The sage walks with Nature, and finds her paths peace. But the question arises, What nature? By nature he means both the nature of the universe, whose laws man can discover, and the nature within us. He knows that there are two natures within us, the animal and the divine; but the divine only is man's true nature, which is reason and conscience. The human soul and the world-soul should be in accord.

His master-idea, as with the Greek thinkers, is thus fitness, congruity, what is becoming, though he insists on strength, not on beauty, and strength with him is hardness. The emotions are failures, disturbances, diseases, 'the pagans of the souls;' and, when unsubdued, they establish a mob-rule. That only is good which springs from rightly-ordered reason. He holds that men are tormented with the opinions they have of things, and not by the things themselves. He divides all things into three classes—the good, the bad, and the indifferent, which lie beyond the power of man and do not concern the sage, though they are the treasures of the unwise. Pleasure and pain, health and happiness, wealth, life, and death itself are among things indifferent. He thus studies not to enlarge his estate, but to contract his desires, and cares only for the goods which make men good. Happiness is not the sanction of righteousness, it is a by-thing; duty is the main matter. He thus distinguishes the obligation from the attractions and rewards of virtue, and agrees with Seneca that 'happiness is the companion, not the guide of our course.' He is content with naked duty, and its stern self-flattery. His one recipe for happiness is the

cold one of not caring for those things that are not in our own power. The sage desires nothing but virtue, and fears nothing but vice. By lessening his wants he approaches nearer to the divine perfection, which is absolutely free from wants.

The gospel of Epictetus is found in such phrases as these, which he is ever repeating: live agreeably to nature; act according to reason; virtue is the only good, and is sufficient for happiness; care for nothing that lies beyond your own will or power; keep yourself independent of external goods; have right opinions; be not the dupe of appearances. 'In resignation to destiny, the Stoic picture of the wise man is complete. Resignation involves that peace and happiness of mind, that gentleness and friendliness, that idea of duty and that harmony of life, which together make up the Stoic definition of virtue.'¹

In spite of his fatalism, he is the champion of the imperial majesty of the will. His estimate of its resisting, triumphing power, reminds us of *Prometheus Bound* and of Milton's *Satan*. He would not have believed one word of the modern theory that heredity and environment make us what we are. He teaches that all outward influences must bow to the spirit that will not bow to them. He exults in the persuasion that no power can injure the man who does not injure himself. He can set no bounds to the power of a trained and educated will when guided by an accepted principle. Thus the sage controls the world within and the world without, and will not let fortune triumph over virtue, and defies and crushes the hostile mob of circumstances and customs. This is the inmost core of Stoicism. The sage presents the prow against wind and wave and all the buffetings of fortune, and holds bravely on to his goal. He is not the child, but the maker of his destiny and the creator of his character, which is only a completely fashioned will. Destiny is as nearly related to character as the flower is to the bud. Probably no other thinker ever went further in

¹ Zeller, p. 314.

magnifying will-force. 'The will is alone vice or alone virtue,' he says. To a young exquisite who wished to be his pupil, he said, 'You are not flesh and hair, but you are will; if your will is beautiful, then you are beautiful.' He thinks that only the iron-willed have the genius to be men. He mistakes penance for discipline, and aims at making men of marble.

His favourite illustrations show the master-current of his system. His ideal city was Sparta, where it needed more courage to be a coward than a brave man. Its men of adamant were after his own heart. He tells admiringly that he once saw a Spartan whipped to death without groaning or complaining. The sage should fight to the last, and die like the Spartans at Thermopylæ, not conquered, but fatigued with conquering: *non victi sed vincendo fatigati*. He often quotes Hercules, the chief of the heroes and emblems of antiquity, who in Rome was more god than hero. His definite choice in youth at the cross-roads; his preferring virtue with toil to pleasure with ease; his iron will in an iron frame; his life-long victory over opinion and appearance; his secret of patiently extracting strength from the difficulties which threatened to extinguish him; his ignorance of the way of yielding; his loyalty and constancy; his persevering and victorious championship of causes that seemed hopeless; his purging the earth from monsters and tyrants; his finding only in his twelfth labour the full reward of the other eleven; his godhead achieved by manhood through ceaseless endeavour—all these yielded the sage splendid illustrations of what he wished to be. Like Paul, he was also fascinated by the image of the wrestler. Some would infer from this that he knew the New Testament, but the same comparison was used by Plato and others.¹ He triumphantly describes the sage as the true athlete, who wrestles for freedom, happiness, and kingship, and hopes to be a crowned conqueror. He has rough antagonists, whom he forces to contribute to his

¹ Lecky, i. 284.

success, for their keen resistance draws out all his best powers, and supplies the materials out of which true manhood is woven. Thus he never complains of the sweat and dust of the arena. He is, however, unlike the athlete in one point, he does not retire in old age. Socrates is his perfect man. 'You are not yet a Socrates,' he says to his pupils; 'but you ought to live as one who wishes to be a Socrates.'

Epictetus describes the ideal sage in the most extravagant terms. He is greater than any of the Cæsars. He has tasted the joys of self-conquest, which are nobler than those of world-conquest; he is lord not of Rome, but of mankind; he sits on a throne that is never vacant, and never knows a change of masters. In no respect does he stand below all-conquering Jupiter. He has even the better of God, who is wise by His own nature, whereas the sage has won all his own wisdom.

Rome was then rotting to her doom, and Epictetus regards society as a sea of corruption, in which only a few strong swimmers here and there—each far apart from his fellows—could reach the shore in safety. He regrets that Socrates did not persuade one-thousandth part of his hearers to take care of themselves. Yet he believes in the complete and instantaneous conversion of sensual men, and expects great things from the sage, though he does not hope that many will become sages. He teaches that the humblest slave may become a true freeman, a king wearing the noblest crown, and a friend of God. This lofty philosophy was suggested by necessity, matured by adversity, and intensified by a revolt against the foulest degradation. Action and reaction were equal, and out of the glowing furnace the iron came as shining steel.

The Saintliness of Epictetus.—I shall now show why I have called Epictetus the Saint of Heathendom. His morality became piety because in all he did and suffered he was accepting the will of God. He recognises a divine law to which he would absolutely submit himself. In creed he is a Cynic, but he has the sternness without the

sourness of that school. He has both the courage and the practice of his convictions. He does not approve of the better and follow the worse. His are the inconsistencies of one whose life is better than his creed. He lived the great things he spoke, and greater things than these. Celsus professes to prefer the constancy of Epictetus above that of Jesus. His Stoicism is softened and tempered by fervent piety, and he is wonderfully free from affectation and pride. He rises far above 'that stream of tendency,' 'the not ourselves, which makes for righteousness.' His piety is occupied not with it but with Him. 'It is not possible,' he says, 'to eject great vices otherwise than by looking up to God and fixing your affections on Him only.' 'What do you mean by attaching yourself to God?' he asks; and replies, 'In this sense, that whatever God wills a man also shall will, and what God does not will a man also shall not will.' He teaches that we ought to swear allegiance to God as soldiers do to Cæsar, and to live as under the eye of the invisible God. 'Be willing,' he says, 'to appear beautiful before God. . . . Remember God: call on Him as a helper and protector. Lift up your head at last as released from slavery. Dare to look up to God and say, Deal with me for the future as Thou wilt; I am of the same mind as Thou art; I am Thine; I refuse nothing that pleases Thee.' Very touching is his adoring gratitude. Theoretical fatalist though he is, his is no sullen, trembling submission to all-conquering fate, but a most cheerful piety. Man's chief end, he tells us, is to 'sing hymns and bless the Deity, and tell of His benefits.' 'For what else can I do, a lame old man, than sing hymns to God? If I were a nightingale, I would do the part of a nightingale; if I were a swan, I would do like a swan. But now I am a rational creature, and I ought to praise God: this is my work. I do it, nor will I desert this post so long as I am allowed to keep it; and I exhort you to join in this same song.'

He has a 'seasoned and passionless philanthropy,' which bursts the bounds of his creed and rises above the level of

his school. He tells those who leave their own children to perish, that the silly sheep and savage wolves put them to shame. He pleads for humanity towards the slaves. He has an inkling of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of men. One of his favourite ideas is that he is a citizen of the world, which is one great city. He plainly teaches the original unity of man. He pleads for friendship, while holding that the sage is sufficient for himself in all things. Here again his heart gets the better of his head. In days when mercy was a thing forgotten, he teaches that we should show pity rather than anger to the vicious, just as we pity the blind and the lame. He fears to condemn too strongly, lest he should seem to hate the evil-doers as well as the evil. He makes a near approach to the Christian virtues of patience and submission, and most Christians might learn from him how a Christian should suffer. He learnt in suffering what he teaches in his philosophy. His motto, 'Bear and forbear,' was always on his lips. His gentle and unfailing resignation proved that the cruellest calamities and wrongs had neither soured nor broken his heart. He never loses his dignity nor thoughtful cheerfulness. He believes that everything has two handles, one by which it may be borne and one by which it may not. He has the happy art of pitching his tent on the sunny side of the hill on the darkest days. He strives to accept his afflictions, and even to welcome them as a divine blessing. He has also a genuine missionary spirit. He regards himself as 'the messenger, spy, and herald of God,' and feels constrained to spread abroad the knowledge of God's will, and to love all men as being also the subjects of God. He is ever pleading the case of the soul against the senses, and waging war with fancy and fortune, as the tyrants of mankind. He holds the adulterer to be a wolf and an ape, and not a man. He would fain persuade us that only the irrational is intolerable. He strives to make good men in an age when manhood had rotted away. His life is a reproach to many who bear the Christian name, and few

sincere Christians retire so completely as he did from all sensuality and earthliness.

The Power of Stoicism.—The Stoic is one of the mighty dead who rule the world. His system was second only to Christianity as a civilising power in Rome, and it moulded Roman law. Brace magnifies its mighty and beneficent influence as the most noble moral system of Heathendom. It made the best men and women in Heathendom, though in some respects it unwomaned its women and hardened its men into insensibility. It, however, had next to no power over the masses; it was solitary and selfish, and so did not rouse enthusiasm or new-create public opinion. It contributed to the monkery, asceticism, and chivalry of the Middle Ages. It also fed the thought of Pascal. French Republicans, in the Reign of Terror, who renounced Christianity, gave themselves to Stoicism. Bishop Butler has made many familiar with the Stoic rule of living according to nature. John Foster's celebrated essay, *On Decision of Character*, is a successful delineation of Stoicism. Many of our most vigorous writers, such as South, often moralise in the Stoic style. Carlyle partially agrees with the Stoics in his views of God and worship of *strength*. Stoicism has contributed elements of great energy to modern thought. Every man should have in him a dash of the Stoic, but always combined with many gentler elements which the Stoic sternly rejected. Our age inclines too much to the rival system of Epicurus, and hence the complaint that 'the youths of the new generation lack strength to dominate circumstances.' Modern culture, or that which claims the name, is largely Epicurean. We need that high discipline which begets robustness and prepares for fruitful service. Stoicism has recently been revived in what is called the 'Stoic-Epicurean' creed, which is now fashionable among our eclectic literary unbelievers, like the Mills, Mr. Spencer, and Matthew Arnold.¹

Stoicism and Christianity.—We may believe

¹ Iverach's *Is God Knowable?* p. 177.

that Epictetus knew nothing of the New Testament: only once does he even seem to mention the Christians, when he speaks of the Galileans as despising through habit the guards and swords of the tyrants. He several times mentions the Jews, and some have fancied that he confounds the Christians with them. This silence need not surprise us, for one of the greatest wonders of history is the fact that the Roman historians, famed as they were for their eagle-eyed acuteness, have, during the first three centuries, only some ten or twelve brief and scornful references to the Church. Epictetus probably would not have deigned to examine the religion of the Nazarene, had it come in his way. For though Stoicism closely approaches Christianity in many of its precepts, the two systems are radically opposed.¹ Many Stoic maxims resemble those of the Bible about the value of externals, the grandeur of the soul, the majesty of will and conscience, and the unity of mankind. Yet the Stoic was in the worst possible mood for receiving the Gospel. He was not found among the poor in spirit. As the poet says—

The Stoic proud, for pleasure, pleasure scorned.

The Pharisee of philosophy, he stood apart, thanking God that he was not as other men. Though Epictetus was personally more modest and humble than his creed or his class, he yet exalts pride and self-reliance into his chief virtues. He aspires, by his own unaided virtue, to be the equal of God, has no consciousness of sin, except as a contradiction of his own nature, and counts humiliation the worst of stains, and humility as self-degradation. The sense of virtue has in his system the same place as the sense of sin in Christianity. His is a self-created, self-centred, self-sufficing virtue. He wraps himself in the mantle of his virtue,

¹ Bishop Lightfoot, at the close of his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians*, gives both coincidences and contrasts between Stoicism and Christianity. The Hon. T. Talbot, in his translation of the *Enchiridion*, gives Scriptural parallels to nearly all the precepts of Epictetus, and Dr. Farrar also supplies a considerable number.

and defies adverse fortune. He draws all his supplies from within, scorning to seek or accept help from without. 'If you would have any good thing,' he says, 'receive it from yourself.' 'Thus I trample on the pride of Plato,' said Diogenes as he soiled the rich carpet of Plato. 'But with greater pride, Diogenes,' was the apt reply. The Stoic's pride always appeared through the holes in his threadbare garment. He was his own god and saviour, and professed to 'fulfil all righteousness,' and give the finishing stroke to nature, and so make himself, to use his own expression, round and polished as a steel ball, on which no impression can be made.

One to whose smooth-rubb'd soul can cling
Nor form, nor feeling, great nor small;
A reasoning, self-sufficing thing,
An intellectual all-in-all!

Quite in the Stoic spirit, Cicero says, 'We boast justly of our own virtue, which we could not do if we derived it from the Deity, and not from ourselves.' Stoicism was thus contrary both to grace and nature. A religion of grace seemed to him a contradiction in terms, for the essence of virtue lay in its being an unaided achievement, and grace thus spoiled all goodness. The offer of the forgiveness of sin was an insult to the Stoic, who had to renounce every virtue he prized before he could receive the Gospel. Then the deepest tendency of the heart, as every man feels in his emergencies, is to go out of itself for nourishment and support. Stoicism drives it in upon itself, and makes it lean upon itself alone. In our great sorrows the Stoic bids us fall back upon the resources in our own heart, forgetting that it is the heart which is overwhelmed and most needs succour. It thus avails not to summon the lion heart to the aid of reason, to conquer both the animal within and the world without. Further, the Stoic also sought to exterminate the God-given emotions, and so made its votary less than a man by trying to make him more. For

Unless above himself he can
Erect himself, how poor a thing is man!

Christianity gives a man a heart of iron towards himself, and a heart of flesh towards others : Stoicism gave a man a heart of iron towards both himself and others. Its virtues were apt to harden into the adjacent vices. The Stoics, to quote Montaigne, tried to gratify their senses by insensibility, and to live by their death. Stoicism had many other blemishes. It had no respect for the weak and the erring ; it showed the ancient contempt for women ; it had no bold and zealous protest against the shocking immoralities of the age. At its very best it only advised men not to be wicked overmuch, lest they should suffer. Some Stoics allowed the worst sensualities, as being conformable to nature. Epictetus is free from such a reproach, and excelled Socrates in this respect ; yet he only counsels men to shun sensuality as far as they can, and not to reprove those who are guilty of it. 'It is better,' he says, 'that thy slave should be wicked than that thou shouldst be unhappy.' His precepts have neither creative energy nor firm foundation, for conformity to nature is one of the vaguest phrases.

J. S. Mill, in his essay on *Nature*, holds that to follow nature is unmeaning, irrational, and immoral ; that the word nature has three senses ; that both civilisation and art are contrivances against nature, and that man's duty is to mend, not to follow nature. The degenerate Epicurean claimed that the belly was the place where centred the philosophy conformable to nature ; and even the witty cooks claimed that they laid hold on the *summum bonum*. Stoicism professed to teach men how to suffer ; but its trained sufferers were excelled by the poor slaves who were loyal to Christ amid the flames of martyrdom and in presence of the roaring lions in the amphitheatre. The voice from the ages is

Oh my brother men heroic,
Toilers with the hand or brain,
'Tis the Christian, not the Stoic,
That best triumphs over pain.

We can thus understand why the Porch was seldom the vestibule to the Church. Christianity gained no converts

from among the Stoics, though some of the early fathers, like Augustine and Chrysostom, had been Epicureans; but the 'easy way' of Epicurus, with all its mean earthliness, was comparatively free from the pride and self-sufficingness which alienated the Stoic from the faith of Christ. The contrast between the Christian and the Stoic creeds reaches its maximum in their rival estimates of the sacredness of human life. In these evil days despair of life, as Zeller tells us,¹ often sank to the suicide-mark, and suicide became at times the fashion among the higher circles in Rome. Life had then become a mere drug in the market. Many Stoics laid aside the body as they laid aside worn-out clothes, and withdrew from life as they withdrew from a house that was no longer weather-proof. They forgot that it is not the hero but the coward who flies from the battle when it waxes fierce. Pliny concluded that kind mother-earth produces many poisonous plants, like hemlock, that men in distress might make away with themselves. Epictetus discourages, but does not forbid, suicide. He bids them wait till God gives the signal for departure; but he tells them that 'the door is open,' and that if life does not please, they should give it up, as the child when tired of his game says, 'I will play no more;' just as Buddha teaches that life is a fair which a man should gladly quit in quiet when he has seen all its shows. In this he agrees with Epicurus, who teaches that the sage should cull the flowers of life, and that if too much torn by its thorns he should kill himself.

We may justly honour Epictetus as the Saint of Heathendom. He stands apart in his solitary grandeur, in degraded Rome but not of it, a hero of natural virtue triumphing over all adversities, and attaining to many graces. To borrow an Indian simile, he is a white water-lily growing in a muddy pool. As a moral phenomenon he is an astonishing man, and a noble spectacle of what Bossuet calls 'the Christianity of nature.' This beautiful soul gives a colour of truth to the saying that the infidelity of pagans has performed greater

¹ Pages 312-317.

things than the faith of Christians has done: *Non præstat fides quod præstitit infidelitas*. Yet how contradictory and unsatisfactory his creed! how poor all the consolation he offers to sorrowing men and women! His system crushes and mocks the dearest of human affections; it begins by demanding the suicide of the heart, and often ends with simple suicide. It can offer only the consolation of death, which most needs consolation; and in the great Beyond it expects only a refusion of the human soul into the world-soul or nature forces, a universal conflagration in which all consciousness shall perish. Place the Saint of Heathendom alongside of his great contemporary Saint Paul, and you at once feel that they represent two totally different orders of saintship.

Inexpressibly sad as are the last words of Stoicism—despair and suicide,—the ripest fruit of modern unbelieving culture is still more appalling. Many of its disciples in Russia, Germany, and England are devoured with hopeless melancholy. Their awful pessimism is confessedly a revival of Oriental Buddhism, which robs humanity of hope for the life to come, and so of hope for this life also. For Goethe says truly, ‘they who expect no other life, are for this life already dead.’ It teaches, to quote Edwin Arnold’s *Light of Asia*, that ‘we are ghosts from the inane,’ that ‘nothingness is the issue and crown of being,’ that ‘our mortal life is a woe, a moan, a sigh, a sob, a storm, a strife, a long-drawn agony. We are told that this imported Buddhism is growing fashionable among English literary gentlemen. It is known among us by a new-born word, Pessimism. The Germans call it *Weltschmerz*, or world-pain, the smart of living at all. In many cases this weariness of life is quite different from the Byronic, which was the fruit of a sated sensuality to which life had no new pleasure to offer. James Payn, one of the prophets of this modern pessimism, in his essay entitled *The Midway Inn*,¹ declares that the question, Do I wish to go out of life? is getting

¹ In the *Nineteenth Century* for May, 1879.

answered very widely in the affirmative by men of his own class, and that suicide is now probably far more frequent among them than is generally supposed. He wonders how many a time in these later years has a hand been stayed, with a pistol or cup of cold poison in it, by the thought, 'If I do this, my family will lose the money I am insured for, besides the premiums.' This creed is commended to us by other writers in prose and verse, who passionately declare that the game of life is not worth the candle, and whose utterances beget a spiritual nausea.¹ What a creed for men who enjoy the boon of living in the nineteenth century, in a free country, amid all the advantages of modern culture, and with many special favours of Providence! It really has come to this, that when we ask bread from our modern sages they grimly offer us a cup of hemlock and a sharp-pointed dagger! Their gospel is a recommendation of the most repulsive of crimes, self-murder; and the last achievement of their philosophy is to turn the philosopher into his own executioner, thus even insulting reason and inciting to high treason against man. How lonely and desolated is the heart of the logical and courageous unbeliever!

Great God! I'd rather be
A pagan suckled in a creed outworn.

Modern cultured heathenism has made considerable progress since the days of *Sartor Resartus*, when the gifted Herr Teufelsdröckh was kept from suicide by the faint after-shine from the sun of Christianity which had set in his horizon. Those who have derived stimulus from Carlyle must read with deep pain the closing chapters of the history of his *Life in London*. His gospel of labour completely broke down in his last years, and, as Froude tells us, life at last became intolerable to him. He commended a dear friend who had taken leave of life by suicide. 'Often and often he spoke enviously of the Roman method, and regretted that it was no longer permitted.'

¹ See the admirable tract on *Modern Pessimism*, published by the Religious Tract Society.

Modern unbelievers can scarcely boast of originality and progress when their answers to the greatest questions are only wavering echoes of Buddha and the ancient Stoics. It now appears that to men who can dare to think out and live out their creed, the only alternative is Christ or utter despair. 'Farewell all hope to you who enter here,' is the inscription over the portals of non-Christian systems. This discovery is likely to beget in most healthy-minded doubters a generous recoil which may dispose them to take sanctuary in the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, which gives men the true motive for life, and enables them to die in peace because through it life and immortality have been brought to light. Many of the best sages, ancient and modern, have seen no impropriety in suicide. Millions of Christians have died in perfect peace, and those who bent over them have heard such breathings as these, 'Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.' 'O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.'

V.

CHRIST AND HIS COMPETITORS.

[The facts upon which the argument in this chapter is based are gathered largely from the works of Max Müller, Ernest Naville, and Dr. Luthardt; and also from Dr. Tholuck's *Der Sittliche Character des Heidenthums.*]



COMPARATIVE religion is an imperial theme which is now filling the learned world with debate. It is a creation of our age, a favourite study with many, and a passion with some. The sacred books of ancient religions have been translated into English, bygone ages have been made to live over again before us, and a large and growing company of writers in Great Britain and America are presenting to us the fresh light which has thus been shed upon the religious life of mankind. To collect the faiths of the world, to collect the faiths of even London, were an overwhelming task. The man who attempts it would not be able to see the wood for the trees. Every religion is complex, and has many variations. Hence this study offers great temptations to sacrifice truth to epigram, and indulge an easy off-hand way of comparing religions, which is rife in vague generalities and false analogies. But when we come from generals to particulars, and single out two or three of the choicest spirits of Heathendom, to whom the suffrages of mankind have adjudged the first place, the study is then clothed with a warm human interest, and we at once feel that we have to do with what is both manageable and memorable. We can thus hope to read off the highest water-mark which unaided

human speculation and virtue have reached, and we may then safely compare it with the Christian standard.

This plan is fair both to Heathendom and Christianity. Many modern non-Christian writers would frankly avow that they present in a modern dress or garb the ideas of the ancient sages, who are their tutors in morals and spirituals. Those who wish to know whether the modern sages are likely to excel the ancients as rivals to Christ, should examine the newest religion that has been offered to us—Comte's religion of humanity, a religion which takes no notice either of God or eternity. Then fairness to Christianity requires us to contrast it with the teaching of the best representative men of ancient Heathendom. For we may easily confound Christian and heathen elements. No modern system of unbelief is a pure product of the light of nature only, for all modern thought has been touched by Christ with penetrating energy. Living impulses from the Bible are now in the air around, and in the very blood of modern thinkers. Nearly all acts of public utility are inspired by the Gospel spirit, even among those who are not believers of the Gospel. The moral ambitions of civilised men are due to Christ, whose thoughts have colonised the civilised world. They who say that we owe more to modern culture than to the Bible, are like the countryman who maintained that we are more indebted to the moon than to the sun, because the sun shines by day, when we don't need its light; or like the boy who, surveying himself in the looking-glass, declared that his father took after him. The Gospel has greatly lessened its own evidences by having lessened the surrounding darkness.

It may thus easily happen that some modern sages light their taper at a torch which they scorn, drink of a stream whose source they ignore, and feed on the fruits of the tree they would fain cut down; they would rob the mother of her own children, and preserve the sunbeams while destroying the parent sun. Christianity, like Joseph, is a fruitful bough by a well, whose branches run over the wall, and men not

of Joseph's lineage would claim the fruit, as if it had grown on their own unenclosed common. The pedigree of reigning ideas is now nearly as well known as the pedigree of reigning families, and we can discover what ideas were known to the sages,¹ and what ideas Christ only has given to the world.

Writers like Max Müller plead pathetically that we should thoroughly appreciate all the good in the sages. Most certainly; but in the spirit of the ancient saying, *Amicus Socrates, amicus Plato, major amica Veritas*. It were both folly and ingratitude in us to think slightingly of them.

Who scoffs at our birthright? The words of the seers,
And the songs of the bards in the twilight of years,
All the foregleams of wisdom in Santon and Sage,
In prophet and priest, are our true heritage.

The sages deserve our warmest praise. Their virtues derive a striking lustre from the prevailing errors and vices of their age. Their lives might make us blush and bring tears to our eyes. In some respects these pagans might teach Christians their creed, and they still guide some men Christwards. They also supply some of the most interesting and conclusive arguments on behalf of our religion.

The student of comparative religion finds glaring extremes on every hand. Some Christians unwisely dread the whole subject, and will find only splendid vices in the heroes of Heathendom, while others never weary of glorifying non-Christian systems. It is reported that one professor said to another who had been lecturing on this theme, 'Almost thou persuadest me to be a heathen.' Some seem to aim at being good pagans and good Christians too. They burn candles at many and even at rival shrines. They are like some of the Roman emperors, who placed the statue of Christ in their domestic chapels alongside of the statues of the pagan deities. Others, again, are like the young educated Hindoos, who profess to examine everything while they believe nothing, and patronise the missionaries. Not a few seem

¹ By 'the sages' in this lecture are meant those heathen teachers who lived before, or were unacquainted with, Christ.

disposed, like the Brahma Somaj, to borrow equally from Christ and the sages. Max Müller, at the close of his Hibbert Lectures, and in opposition to some of his other utterances, obscurely hints that the science of religion may yet dig out, amid the foundations of all religions, a quiet sanctuary in which scientists may meet for worship. 'Who knows,' he asks, 'but that in time it will grow wider and brighter, and that the crypt of the past may become the church of the future?' Candour in this study is a hard attainment, for we naturally desire to discover in all creeds supports for our own. We thus unawares read into ancient writers our own ideas and moods instead of thinking ourselves back into theirs. Writers of all schools do so. Professor Ferrier would make Socrates a Hegelian before Hegel, and vastly astonishes us by arguing as if the great aim of the homely moralist were to discover what thought is metaphysically. Professor Caird in his *Hegel*, and Principal Caird in his *Philosophy of the History of Religion*, would make out that Hegelianism is just 'Christianity theorised,' of which the highest truth is that 'being and not being are identical,' and the grandest result 'the finding of spiritual unity in a nest of contradictions,' and 'the losing of our individual life to find it in the general.' In explaining Christianity they take no note of its distinguishing facts and doctrines, but occupy themselves chiefly with one of the more general of Christ's sayings. Then there is Edwin Arnold, who, in his *Light of Asia*, sits at the gate of comparative religion, and with insinuating eloquence offers us beautiful fables for facts. He would have us believe that Buddhism is one of the purest and noblest systems of truth yet revealed to man. But Rhys Davids tells a very different story, and so does Mr. Moncure Conway, who used to be of Mr. Arnold's way of thinking while in his study at home, but who, after a visit to the East, declares that Buddhism is an utter failure, and that 'of religion in a spiritual sense there is none in it.' The student of comparative religion is thus exposed to diverse biases and extremes.

The New Heathendom. — It becomes us to ascertain what the sages can do for us, for many are now attempting to restore their lost dominion. Christianity and Heathendom are again face to face, as in the first centuries, and we have to compare and contrast the two systems, exactly as the early fathers did. The fashionable religion, with some men of letters, is a blending of the Stoic and Epicurean. J. S. Mill tells us that his father's views of life combined the Epicurean, Stoic, and Cynic, for he was an Utilitarian, and did not expect to find much happiness in life. Some, like Symonds, envy the ancient Hellenes their serene, faun-like enjoyment of nature, and cannot forgive the Hebrews for having made it impossible to us by their impertinent dogmas about God and conscience. Many join him in bemoaning that 'Great Pan is dead.' Some of the Greeks of our day desire only the wisdom which the Greeks in Paul's day had. Their ideal seems to be the cultivated, sensual man who develops himself confidently and harmoniously. Some of our new 'Humanists' would paganise the modern mind and yet retain the Christian name. Elizabeth Browning says well—

I disbelieve in Christian-pagans, much
As you in women-fishes. If we mix
Two colours, we lose both, and make a third
Distinct from either.

The author of *Natural Religion* would reconcile paganism, science, and Christianity, and establish a 'free religion,' which even atheists could profess. He would retain only the natural truths in Christ's teaching, and would preserve religion by throwing Christianity overboard. Some of our contemporaries claim the sages as their teachers, though the sages would scarcely have accepted them as pupils. These facts seem to prove that in morals and spirituals the circle of possible ideas has been completed, and that our ablest non-Christian thinkers are only presenting in a new garb or dress the conceptions of the ancients. These two thousand years have added little to Euclid's mathematics, Aristotle's

logic, Apelles' painting, or Phidias' statuary, and apart from the teaching of Christ and the Apostles, they have added quite as little to our stock of religious knowledge. Comte's religion of humanity is no exception, for its distinguishing idea is undoubtedly borrowed from Jesus of Nazareth, and in transferring, Comte has only mutilated it. The unbelieving modern mind is like the traveller lost on the prairie, who goes round in a circle and sinks down exhausted on the spot whence he started. He that draws near may hear now and again mutterings about 'suicide,' and about 'life not being worth living.' After Goethe had mastered the writings of the sages he wrote these lines in scorn—

This case was mine too, when at leisure,
 What all the sages wrote I read.
 When with their small wits they would measure
 The wealth of worlds around us spread :
 I thought of Samuel then, when he
 Made Jesse's sons in row appear,
 And when the seven were counted, said—
 Are *all* thy children here ?

We do not stop with the words of the prince of German poets. We read the story to the end, and deeply ponder Jesse's answer, 'There remaineth yet the youngest.' We thus pay homage to the Anointed One whom the poet does not mention.

The Results of this Study.—An inquiry into the religions of the world convinces us that religion is an essential part of the heart of man. Homer truly says, 'As young birds ope their mouths for food, so all men crave for the gods.' As the torch upwards or inverted flames heavenward, so man's spirit trembles Godward. Religion is not a mere phenomenon, but an essence. It is as truly a part of our nature as are appetite and nerves. Can you name any other feature of humanity that possesses more strikingly than religion the marks of antiquity, universality, and general consent? Man's religious tendency is at least as apparent as his social tendency, which the Comtists hold to be universal.

Yet monks, solitaries, men-haters, etc., are unsocial, just as some men are seemingly without religion. Some men dehumanise themselves, but that does not destroy the argument from the general consent of mankind through all the multitudinous ages. Everywhere we find traces of the victorious instinct of God and the fear of judgment to come. Let us consult the experts. Max Müller says, 'We may safely say that, in spite of all researches, no human beings have been found anywhere who do not possess something which to them is religion.' 'Religion is not a new invention. It is at least as old as the world we know.' 'The earliest man was in possession of religion, or rather possessed by religion.'¹ The best antiquarians, as Tholuck tells us, find that everywhere tradition, not speculation, is the mother of religion as of speech, that the common people in the most ancient nations were fully more religious than the learned, and that the barbarians were at least as religious as the Greeks. They discover traces of religion growing wild and luxuriating like self-sown plants in the richest soil. Religion is embalmed in the traditions and institutions that have come down to us from prehistoric times. Robert Browning somewhere speaks of 'How Fable first precipitated Faith.' The fact, however, is that faith precipitated or created fable. Almost everywhere the oldest documents are religious. The men on the utmost verge of the storied past were not content with mere morality, but always mixed it with religious mysteries. Plutarch says that you may sooner find a city without earth to stand on than find a State existing without faith in the gods, which is the bond of all society, and the support of all legislation. Nearly every page of Plutarch's *Lives* proves that all the men of antiquity were deeply religious, and that when religion was driven out by the door of faith it always returned by the door of superstition. The German name for superstition is *aberglaube*, which Matthew Arnold translates *extra-belief*, but which more literally Englished is *nevertheless-belief*. The men who show it are unbelievers, who, *neverthe-*

¹ Hibbert Lectures, pp. 2, 53, 79,

less, believe. They still believe, if not in heavenly, at least in hellish powers.¹ Sylla, in his battles, carried in his bosom, and often kissed, a small image of some god, and one of his colleagues washed his hands in holy water at the temple door after he had murdered one of his neighbours. Both these practices are still observed by modern Romanists. The movements of the great military heroes were decided by the flight of birds, the aspect of the heavens, and other trifles. The Emperor Augustus, one of the strongest-minded of the world's rulers, was a sceptic, but he was afraid to be alone at night, carried with him charms against thunder and lightning, and was quite distressed if he put on his left shoe before his right. Sacred chickens accompanied the Roman armies, and were fed at the expense of the State, that they might indicate the will of the gods. Hence our word auspicious, from *auspicium*, that is, the examination of birds. Many cases are recorded of noted atheists being converted or confounded by a sudden affliction, old age, or the shadow of death. Horace, in one of his Odes, confesses, with every evidence of sincerity, that a thunderstorm recalled him from the mad philosophy of scepticism to the blest harbour of religious faith. 'The cry of the human' was the same then as now; and nature often, in its bitter need, borrowed the cry of faith, and rose from grief to God. The early Christians often appealed admirably to these sallies or flashes of the soul (*eruptiones animæ*) as revealing an inborn consciousness of God, and proving that religious capacity is a part of the original dowry of man. This spontaneous testimony of the soul, apart from all book-learning, is a most pregnant fact. Even amid the worst vices of the ancient world, religion flourished in some form or other. It was to the depraved Athenians that St. Paul said, 'I perceive that ye are of a religious turn.' Even there religion had to be corrected, not created. This wild growth of religion proves its vitality, as weeds show the qualities and fertility of the soil. The *Autobiography* of J. S. Mill supplies an illustration of our

¹ Tholuck, p. 41.

contention, though of a very different kind from the foregoing. He tells us that he probably stands alone among the educated Englishmen of our day. Some of them have given up religious ideas, but he never had any to give up. His father would not allow him to have any. But if you expel nature with a pitchfork, she will return. In his old age, Mr. J. S. Mill admitted the force of the argument from design, and made vast concessions about the unique character and mission of Christ. Even he proves that, to use an oft-quoted ancient phrase, the soul of man is naturally Christian.

Development in Religion.—Comtists teach that the earliest form of religion was fetichism,¹ which was followed by polytheism, and that again by monotheism, which is to be displaced by the positive philosophy. They hold that monotheism could become common only after a long cultivation of scientific thought. If we are to believe the experts, that theory offers violence to all the facts of history. Max Müller thus describes the first of the three results of the comparative study of religions: 'We shall learn that religions in their most ancient form, or in the minds of their authors, are generally free from many of the blemishes that attach to them in later times.'² Egyptologists assure us that the sublimest portions of the Egyptian religion were demonstrably ancient, and that its last stage was by far the grossest and most corrupt. Ernest Naville says: 'The general impression of all the most distinguished mythologists of the present day is, that monotheism is at the foundation of all pagan mythology,' and that out of it 'antiquity in its infancy formed polytheism.'³ He compares religion to a vigorous young beech which has been cut to the ground, and in which the sap which nourished a single trunk has been divided among a multitude of shoots. The idea of the only

¹ Fetichism worships seen things as if they were living gods, while polytheism uses the seen thing as an image. Fetichism makes 'every-thing god but God Himself.' (Bossuet.)

² *Chips*, vol. i. 49.

³ *The Heavenly Father*, p. 20-23.

God is at the root, though the idols have absorbed all the sap. When we go back as far as history can carry us, we see 'our ancestors sending up together the chant of prayer and the flame of sacrifice.' When history leaves us, tradition's finger points us back to a paradise, a 'golden age' whose glory has faded away from the earth. The golden prime of all pagan religions lies in the farthest past. Hence Plutarch compares the old myths to a rainbow, which is the refraction of the sun's light amid the storms. Thus Socrates teaches that religion is a gift from heaven, through some Prometheus, and that the ancients, who were better than we and nearer the gods, handed it down to us. Religion never flourished more in Rome than in the days of Numa, who reigned about 700 B.C. Plutarch tells us that Numa would not allow the Deity to be represented in the form of man or beast, for he held that men can truly approach God only in their thoughts, and that it was impious to represent the divine by the perishable. During the first 170 years there was no statue or image in the temples of Rome. Numa also instituted a Sabbath, for he commanded all the citizens to abstain periodically from all worldly work and give themselves to the worship of God. Rome was then the hostelry of all virtues; but the decay of religion brought with it the decay of morals,

As in the dying parent dies the child.

The reader of Plutarch will be astonished to find so much healthy and energetic religion among the ancients, and so much interesting truth intersecting even their grossest errors. The dark cloud of paganism has luminous points, and we notice broken rays of light quivering through it. This is one of the charms of 'the classics.' For instance, they deemed religion worthy of their very best, so that the sun has not yet shone on grander buildings than their temples. In all their libations the cup must be full to the brim. The animals for sacrifice must be clean, healthy, unblemished, and such as had never been put to any other use. They must

also be white, and if they had spots they were rubbed white with chalk. They were never dragged to the altar, as the slightest sign of unwillingness made them unacceptable to the gods. At the altar all cords were taken off them, to secure the appearance of a voluntary surrender of life. The priest would not slay the victim till by a movement of its head (secured by pouring water into its ears) it seemed to consent. They always wished it to tremble, as if in deep fear of the gods, and to die without a struggle. It was a bad omen if the flame on the altar did not mount straight and pure to heaven, and terror filled them if the priests 'found no heart within the beast.' Before worship, the sacrificer bathed in spring water, and clothed himself with fresh white garments. We are touched, too, by their craving for the oracles of heaven, even though the disinterred marbles at Pompeii show us how the cunning priests introduced a human actor into the hollow statue whence issued the supposed voice of the gods. We also note with delight, as survivals of the original dowry of the soul, the outbreaks of a just and strong religious feeling amid the worst superstitions. Often paganism seems struggling towards something better than itself, and its errors are the mistakes of a divinely-created instinct. We find many traces of what Tertullian calls 'the Soul naturally Christian.' Contemporary writers tell us that during earthquakes and other great calamities the pagans prayed to God as the Unknown, though when the danger was over they turned again to the idols in the temples. When in sore straits they cried out, 'Great God!' 'Good God,' 'By God,' 'As sure as God lives,' 'God help me,' while their eye was directed not to the temples but to heaven. In the Capitol at Rome there stood an altar with the inscription, '*Deo optimo maximo*,'—'To God the best and greatest.' They thus adored one only God, and placed His goodness before His greatness. We also gladly remember that Heathendom had its 'men of desires' (also called the children of Apollo, the god of light), who rose to extraordinary religious attainments. Plutarch, for

instance, is a splendid specimen of a pious pagan, though he shared most of the superstitions of his age. The spiritual heroes of Heathendom — Æschylus, Socrates, Plato, and Epictetus — astonish us by the bold ventures and sublime imaginings of their ‘god-consciousness,’ which betray no sign of tentative timidity, but reveal an assured conviction, although in them —

The glorious instinct of a deathless soul,
 Confus’dly conscious of her dignity,
 Suggested truths they could not understand.

These facts prove that there is a natural religion to which the words apply, *quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus*. These great sages understood this universal religion more clearly than others, and hence they have been accepted as the mouthpieces of humanity. We thus can better understand how the Apostle Paul, in his sermon at Athens, found such an ample common standing-ground for himself and his hearers. It was not their superstition but their piety that then attracted his notice. And, further, the theory of our Comtists and Hegelians, that religion has risen gradually from the lowest to the highest forms, is driven back along the whole line. The history of non-Christian religions is the history, not of progressive development, but of degeneration.

The Supremacy of Christ. — In contrasting Christ with the sages, we must take each religion as a whole. Some see no impropriety in placing Christ in the same class with the sages, and giving Him the first certificate of merit. With them He is an elect spirit of our race; a religious genius in whom the ‘god-consciousness’ rose to its highest expression, the good Jesus Christ. There is a strong tendency to account for all religions, including Christianity, by development. We must, therefore, read Christianity along with the context of the world’s history. Clodd’s *Childhood of the World* and *Childhood of Religions* show how desperately hard is the task before those who attempt to explain Christianity by natural development.

Take Plato, the greatest spiritual thinker of antiquity. Of all the sages he has made the nearest approach to the solution of man's enigmas. Development did its utmost for him. He was the son and heir of all the age, and gives us the sum of the wisdom of the ancients. But he has many lapses, contradictions, and even shocking errors. He is to be admired rather than imitated; he reveals the darkness as much as the light of nature. One sentence makes comparison between Christ and him impossible. He recommended a community of wives, and wished all children to be brought up in a common pen or fold, where no mother should know her own child, and no child his own mother. Were his plans adopted, all the fairest fruits of our civilisation would be blighted. Christ, on the other hand, was utterly out of the line of the world's development. Born in a most barren age, and in one of the obscurest villages in the world, His only teachers were His peasant-mother, His Bible, and His daily handicraft. He was not even taught as Moses and Paul were. We may safely believe that the name of a Greek or a Roman sage had never been breathed at Nazareth, and that Jesus had never heard a quotation from their writings. Nor did He borrow from the Rabbis. Students of Rabbinical lore declare that His teaching is perfectly un-Jewish, and that there is 'an infinite difference between the Rabbinic expectations of the Messiah and the picture of Him in the New Testament.' As a Jew He belonged to the most conservative race of mankind, and yet His life is full of unheard-of acts, without precedent or parallel, as His doctrines reveal truths concealed from all the sages of the world. His words contain all the wisdom of the world, and also a wisdom which is not of the world. As He died at the age of thirty-three, He had not reached 'the years which bring the philosophic mind.' Though He had only three years of public life, and only eleven humble followers to transmit His religion to mankind, He yet, without effort or wavering, taught those original conceptions which have changed the world, and to

which centuries of enormous mental activity have practically added nothing. The ideals of modern philosophy have not a single good point which is not found in His teachings. Christ is even the unconscious ideal and standard of moral excellency among modern unbelievers, and He is the contemporary of all ages. Further, His life realised His ideals. Nothing about Him is after the style of the sages. He both condemns the world and confidently expects to conquer it. He always speaks of the future and of all mankind as a proprietor speaks of his lawful property. His simple words and facts put to shame all Plato's dreams, and more than fulfil them. The ethics of the Gospel are still ahead of modern attainments. What moral philosopher is there who does not owe his morality to the Gospel? Read all the sacred books in the world, call to your mind all the mythical and historical men who have reached great excellence, and then ask how, on purely natural principles, you can account for Christ? Napoleon, in his captivity, brooded deeply over this subject. He says: 'I know men, and Jesus Christ is not a man. Superficial minds see a resemblance between Christ and the founders of empires and the gods of other religions. That resemblance does not exist. There is between Christ and all other religions whatsoever the distance of infinity.'

Some truths, no doubt, are common to Christ and the sages; but with Christ these truths have their rightful place in a complete, consistent, spiritual unity, while with the sages they form a broken piecework. Natural morality, as far as it goes, is not at strife with Christian ethics. Our faith in the greater does not require us to disown the less. Christ came not to destroy but to fulfil all the truths in natural religion and in heathen religions. Justin Martyr says: 'Whatever things were rightly said, among all men, are the property of us Christians.' For Christianity rests on natural religion as a bridge rests upon its piers. Hence Christ appropriates and amplifies all the loftiest teachings of nature and reason. He absorbs all light as the sun absorbs

the starlights which it had kindled. He publishes anew the law of nature while He reveals a new religion. Perhaps, however, we now take for natural many a truth which was unknown to the sages, and should therefore be regarded as really Christian. Whittier very happily expresses these ideas—

Nor doth it lessen what He taught,
 Or make the gospel Jesus brought
 Less precious, that His lips retold
 Some portion of the truth of old ;
 Denying not the proven seers,
 The tested wisdom of the years ;
 Confirming with His own impress
 The common law of righteousness.
 We search the world for truth, we cull
 The good, the pure, the beautiful,
 From graven stone and written scroll,
 From all old flower-fields of the soul ;
 And, weary seekers of the best,
 We come back laden from our quest,
 To find that all the sages said
 Is in the Book our mothers read,
 And all the treasure of our thought
 In His harmonious fulness wrought.

Our argument gathers strength when we turn from the sages to the religious systems which they supported. The saddening pages of Tholuck and Döllinger prove that the most shameless immoralities formed a part of the greatest religious festivals of Greece and Rome. Aristotle thought that the young should not witness them, lest they should be corrupted. It would be hard to name any vice for which the Greeks and Romans could not plead the example of one or more of the greater gods. Thus the gods became the corrupters of men; and the most shameful vices were religiously practised to the greater glory of the gods. So far from believing that man was made in the image of God, they made their gods in the image of their worst men. These religions are thus responsible for the vices of Heathendom; but Christianity is not responsible for the

vices of Christendom, which are utterly opposed to the precepts and example of Christ. This stream is perfectly pure in its source, and is sullied only in and by the clay over which it flows. The religions of Greece and Rome, as explained by the most gifted thinkers the world has seen, knew nothing of an absolutely free Creator of the universe. They had no clear, unwavering idea of moral law, of sin or guilt, of sins, of grace, of purity of soul, or of the life to come.¹ Their Gilead had no balm for the soul's deepest wounds. Heathendom, like its grand temples, was showy without, cold and empty within. The representative of its afflicted ones is Brutus, on the battlefield of Philippi, exclaiming with his dying breath, 'Virtue, I worshipped thee, and find thee but a name.' Some of the sages were directors of conscience to the penitent, perplexed, and dying. Like the doctors, they hung out a signboard and charged a regular fee. But there was no help in their 'common common-places.' The dark light of nature could not guide them in their sorest need. At the pinch philosophy failed the philosopher. The most striking feature, however, of the teaching of the sages is its powerlessness. Even when they told the truth, they could not make the truth tell. Their light brought with it no creative heat. They were ineffectives in the presence of evil. The salt of paganism, they salted themselves only, and that often but partially. To quote Coleridge: 'Across the night of paganism philosophy flitted on, like the lantern-fly of the tropics—a light to itself and an ornament, but, alas! no more than an ornament of the surrounding darkness.' Their philosophy shed a cold light, like that of winter, on the loftiest peaks, and left the peopled valleys without a ray. And they knew this. For they had no inspiring hope of the progress of society; their utmost aim was merely to preserve it from degeneration. Truth appeals to time, and what does time say about it after eighteen centuries? As 'history is no sphinx,' we can interpret its utterance in such a matter.

¹ Döllinger, i. 191, 223.

The Christian student who, in the light of history, contrasts Christ and Christianity with their rivals, may justly be conscious of such deep exultation as appears in the bold words with which Paul challenged the sages of his day. 'Where is the wise?' (literally the sage) 'where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?' (1 Cor. i. 20.) Some of the most ignorant and vicious slaves had excelled all the sages in virtue, and the Apostle asks the sages to produce such living proofs of the power of their wisdom. Every century, every mission-field at home and abroad, has given added emphasis to the appeal. And surely history amply proves that the Church's grandest moral triumphs have been granted, not to the men of 'no dogma,' but to those who urged a very definite and joyous evangelism. Two Scottish professors, who are not professional theologians, have successfully expounded the philosophy of this question. Professor Blackie, in his *Four Phases of Morals*, lucidly sets forth the practical impotence of the sages and the creative energy of Christ. Principal Shairp, in his *Studies on Poetry and Philosophy*, has a striking lecture on 'The Moral Dynamic.' He shows that other systems have the Mechanics but not the Dynamics of religion, and that 'they provide all for virtue except the life to live it.' Christ only can give us what we need most, a motive power to beget in us the virtues we admire; the sages lack creative fire. Their systems have no radiating light, 'no virtue-making power,' no bountiful and forthgoing disposition, no generous eagerness to fill all men with kindred life and joy. Hence the dates B.C. and A.D. mark the one grand epoch in the world's history.

The Nazarene has achieved the greatest victory recorded by history; His ideas mastered both the learned Romans and the barbarous Goths. He is the vanquisher of the old and the maker of the modern world, the one fresh, unspent, spiritual force in the world to-day. His religion is the remedy for all ills, and the inexhaustible source of healthy

life. The world needs before all things a life-giving, universal religion. But all these sages were essentially aristocratic, and their aristocracy embraced a very few privileged natures. They never dreamt of theocratic equality or of the sacredness of man as man. They felt that they would vulgarise both themselves and their knowledge by publishing it to the world. It was counted the greatest sin to divulge the secrets of the immortal gods to the mob. 'Off, ye profane!' said the officiating priest to all but the initiated. The highest priest was a mystery-monger, who, in his dark recess, closed to the many, muttered but did not proclaim, the will of the gods to the few. To them a religion for mankind seemed contrary to nature. 'Whoever believes that a world-wide religion is possible is insane,' wrote Celsus. Christ only is 'the poor man's philosopher.' He bids us 'count no man common or unclean.' The very genius of His Gospel is, 'Come unto Me, all ye that labour.' He has established that universalism which the Court of the Gentiles in the Temple foreshadowed. He has carried the humblest as well as the most learned with Him, and His ideas are now world-wide axioms and proverbs.

Strange, indeed, that the sages, who had the widest intellectual horizon, conceived the narrowest possible gospel; whereas Christ, who had the very narrow horizon of a Jewish peasant, alone attained to the idea of a universal gospel. How unlike them He is! How wholly new, how unique and undreamt-of are His teachings! Nothing about them is after the style of the sons of men. Even J. S. Mill says, 'And whatever else may be taken away from us by rational criticism, Christ is still left; a unique figure, not more unlike all His precursors than all His followers, even those who had the direct benefit of His personal influence.'¹ We may urge that His portrait in the New Testament is true, just because it is so improbable that men could ever have invented it. Very wonderful is His effortless power alongside of the painful impotency of the sages and the decay of their

¹ *Theism*, p. 253.

religions. The answer reported to have been given by the Oracle at Delphi to Julian, the last great supporter of paganism, is historically correct. 'Tell the king the fair-wrought dwelling has sunk into the dust; Phoebus has no longer a shelter or a prophetic laurel, neither has he a speaking fountain; the fair water is dried up.' The Galilean has conquered mighty Greece and Rome, in spite of force, by the naked power of truth, and with a silence and gentleness as of summer conquering winter. Thus comparative religion leads us on to a just conception of the separateness and aloneness of Christ as 'the great Supreme of human history.'

The Reasonableness of Christianity.—This study clearly reveals to us the reasonableness of our faith. Our age demands facts and the scientific spirit. Here are facts; let us study them with scientific impartiality and thoroughness. The successes of the sages prove that man has ineradicable wants and aspirations, their failures that only Christ can satisfy these. Many who decline the Christian name have made remarkable concessions, which, logically carried out, would bring them to our position.¹ The religious history of man proves that he needs light, pardon, peace, spiritual power, and consolation. Who can give him these but Christ, the educator of men, the civiliser, the redeemer, the satisfier of the soul? I have never heard this argument better stated than by a remarkable self-taught man, whom I knew so well as to be acquainted with the steps by which he climbed from atheism to faith. Amid the wildness of his youth he cherished a passion for books. In middle age he resolved to begin a virtuous life. He made it a point of honour to take nothing from the Bible, and he devoted years to the study of the sages. I have not known any University man who was more familiar with their teachings. But his dark past often confronted him, and conscience accused him. Often I have heard him say something like this: 'I was like a sick man afflicted with a

¹ Storrs, p. 374, gives an interesting list of these concessions, and Cairns also, in his *Modern Unbelief*.

specific disease, but the physicians I consulted, so far from curing me, did not understand my disease, or even admit its existence. My chief concern was with the fact of past sin, but my chosen teachers had not a word to say about that ; they entertained me with many true and beautiful sayings about virtue, but never told me how I was to be delivered from the guilt and power of vice and made virtuous. They told me how a good man might make himself better, but not how a bad man might be made good.' Finding no help in the sages, he betook himself to the New Testament, and soon found there exactly what he sought,—the interpretation of his own heart, the remission of sins that are past, and spiritual power to conquer passion and evil habits. He made his own the words of the woman of Samaria, 'Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did : is not this the Christ ?'

This argument rests largely on conscience, in which we have an eternal revelation of God, and which is the central fact of universal religion. Hence the Gospel finds its kindred rays in all men. It was to conscience that Paul confidently appealed at Athens, and at Cæsarea, before Felix. Among men there is more sameness in conscience than in taste, intellect, or any other part of our nature. As there is one God, so there is one conscience in all, and one Christ for all. Christ touches men by the point of conscience, that 'seed of reason planted in every race of men.' As deep calleth unto deep, so conscience calleth unto Christ, and the response is musically complete. The book and the breast agree. God, who made both, does not make half-hinges or locks without keys. Thus natural religion, as we have seen, raises the expectation of something beyond itself. Thus, for those who have to fight their way intellectually to faith, natural religion is the best preparation for revealed. For man cannot supply what his nature demands. Conscience cannot discover or create, but it can emphatically endorse, the remedy when it is proposed. The soul of man 'bears witness to the light,' though itself 'is not that light.

'Conscience is the remnant of creation, but not the instrument of redemption.' We have also seen that the greatest of heathen thinkers were those nearest Christianity. The night of paganism, as one of the fathers said, had its stars, and they pointed to the Morning Star over Bethlehem. Heathendom, as well as Judaism, had in it a prophetic element. Judaism was a sort of normal school, in which spiritual teachers were trained for all mankind. The sages before Christ were not against Christ. Their systems laid claim to no finality; they ended not with a full period, but with a point of interrogation. Their religions had a seeking character, and revealed both their noble dissatisfaction and their hope of something better than that they had reached. Thus we maintain that the Gospel finds a resting-point in the ascertained facts of consciousness, and in our deepest spiritual wants. We maintain that the Christian faith is the highest reason, and in manifold congruity with the mind of man. We also maintain that the great truths of revelation are in profound harmony with nature. We use this phrase, however, not as Professor Drummond, but as Joseph Cook uses it. We mean that the great truths of our faith are in deepest harmony, not with nature, but with human nature. By human nature here, we mean not man's fallen, but man's first nature. We are thinking of man not as begotten in the image of Adam, but as created in the image of God. We mean that nature which the Apostle Paul has in his mind when he tells us that what is opposed to nature is opposed to God, and that men do by nature the things contained in the law.¹ We must do full justice to 'the dual heart of man.' Our unregenerate nature is hostile to that nature, which is God-related and retains a receptivity for the truth. We do not naturalise the supernatural when we insist on its harmony with all the noblest elements in the soul of man. Only thus do we escape from mere naturalism.

Some may assert that this argument is unscientific, as it

¹ Rom. i. 26 ; ii. 14.

takes for granted the reliability of our religious instincts, and only asserts that 'what is wanted, is.' But instinct is the most infallible and unfailing guide in this world. The acutest reason is not so unerring as instinct is. The swallow and the stork never mistake the time of the year or the direction of north or south. The most expert seaman does not know as well as the rats on board when the old ship is doomed. The new-born lamb seeks its mother's milk more unerringly than any son of man seeks his highest good. If we are sure that the religious instinct is an eternal and essential part of our nature, all analogy justifies us in basing our argument upon it.

This, then, is what I do when I wish to gain a thorough persuasion of the divine and human reasonableness of the Christian faith. I confine my attention to the essentials of the faith. I remember that Christianity is an effect of which Christ is both the cause and the sum. I fix my attention upon man's highest nature and deepest needs. I appeal to the broad facts of reason, experience, and conscience. I brood over these threads of connection between Christianity and humanity, which were touched by the hand of the Apostle in dealing with the heathen. I contrast Christendom with Heathendom, and Christ with the sages, and I discover that He is utterly beyond all competition or comparison, and that as there is a heaven-wide difference between Him and the foremost of them, the phrase, 'comparative religion,' is scarcely correct. Thus I am able to give to the unbeliever a reason for the faith that is in me. Very many of the Christian thinkers of our day are conscious that their convictions have gained fresh strength from considerations like these, and the close observer of their favourite phrases will discover that many of them have been coined in the modern mint of comparative religion.

Students of comparative religion who are quite emancipated from dogmatic prejudices admit the force of this argument. Max Müller¹ thus describes the third result of

¹ *Chips*, i. 49.

the study of religions: 'We shall learn to appreciate better than ever what we have in our own religion. No one who has not examined patiently and honestly the other religions of the world can know what Christianity really is, or can join with such truth and sincerity in the words of St. Paul: "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ!"'

Some eagerly debate the question of the salvation of the heathen. The same question was put to Christ. 'Then said one unto Him, Lord, are there few that be saved?' (Luke xiii. 23.) Our Saviour rebuked the curiosity that asked the question, and turned it at once into a better channel, for His only reply was, 'Strive to enter in at the strait gate.' Christ seems to warn us off this region of speculation, and we believe him to be wisest who, when asked about the destiny of the heathen, is content with saying, 'I don't know. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?' We should simply leave this whole question to the justice and mercy of God.

The 'woes of the Gospel' were uttered by Christ against those who shamefully abused the light of the Gospel, not against those to whom the Gospel had not come. The Bible plainly teaches that all who are saved are saved by Christ only, and that men who know the Gospel are saved through the Gospel only; but it nowhere teaches that the merit of Christ cannot overflow the ordinary means of grace, or that there can be no salvation outside the visible Church. We must have a care not to narrow the area of the Spirit's power, for He is ubiquitous as the wind, and 'worketh when, and where, and how He pleaseth.' Some modern writers still insinuate or state that evangelical orthodoxy teaches or implies that all outside the visible Church shall be finally lost. These writers ignore the authoritative declarations of the evangelical churches. A reverent silence does not mean consent to the dogma wherewith they would fain reproach us.

Many are also asking how far the best of the sages were enlightened by Christ and the Holy Spirit. Some of the

most orthodox of the early fathers spoke hopefully on this point. They believed philosophy to be 'a divine gift to the Greeks,' and 'an impulse from God.' They could not believe that it was in vain that the sages knocked at the gates of truth, and paid a mysterious homage to it at a distance. They were disposed to think that some of them, like the Old Testament saints, might be cheered by the sun as yet beneath their horizon. They were even willing to regard some of them as unconscious Christians, who were guided by a secret grace and ministry, or by 'God's private light.' John Calvin says, 'Since God alone is the source of all good, you must not doubt that whatever truth you anywhere meet with proceeds from Him. It is sinful to treat God's gifts with contempt, and philosophy is the gift of God—the noble gift of God; and those learned men who have striven after it in all ages have been incited thereto by God Himself.' In the same spirit Cowper says—

All truth is from the sempiternal source
Of Light divine.

How oft when Paul has served us with a text,
Has Epictetus, Plato, Tully, preached!

Men that, if now alive, would sit content,
And humble learners of a Saviour's worth,
Preach it who might. Such was their love of truth,
Their thirst of knowledge and their candour too!

If the Bible has no definite statements, it has at least many pregnant hints about this subject. There runs through it a protest against the idea that grace can come only through the ordinary visible means. This is a neglected peculiarity of Bible teaching, but it requires to be handled with reverent care. We meet with many pious Gentiles in the sacred page. Abraham received the call of God while an idolater. Melchizedec was outside 'the visible Church,' and yet honoured by Abraham as a true priest of God. Moses and Aaron gave similar recognition to Jethro. Job was an Arabian sheikh. Many other names claim at least some notice under this head. Rahab, the Queen of Sheba, Ruth,

Araunah the Jebusite, Hiram, Cyrus, etc. Some of these are held up to our unstinted admiration. It is most noteworthy that upon the threshold of the New Testament we meet the wise men from the East, who were pagans and star-gazers. They are the representatives of all that is best in the sages. They have noble aspirations, though clouded with error; their superstition paves the way for faith; they show us that there was a star in the firmament of Heathendom guiding Christwards; and though they had not thrown off all their errors, they were yet guided by God. In the Syrophœnician woman, who was a pagan, Christ praised a greater faith than He had found among the Hebrews. The Roman centurion, Cornelius, and 'Peter's house-top dream' with its lesson of the sheet, rise up vividly before us. The Ethiopian eunuch and the Man of Macedonia imploring help, also illustrate this fascinating theme.

We should also deeply ponder the Apostle's sayings about the heathen on Mars Hill and in the first and second chapters of his Epistle to the Romans. He there magnifies the revelation of God in nature and conscience; and he has great faith in the good it will do to open and sensitive souls. While emphasising the speculative errors springing from their depravity (Rom. i. 18-24), and the depravity springing from their speculative errors (Rom. i. 24-32), he teaches that they are to be judged by their light and opportunities. His one charge against the god-estranged heathen is, that they were disloyal to the light which they had, and which, in spite of their vices, revealed God's eternal power and Godhead to them, and constrained them to condemn themselves. His words certainly seem to imply that some of the sages walked with God according to their light, and that they were accepted of Him. Might not such justly use the words, 'Doubtless thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not?' 'Other sheep I have,' says the great Shepherd, 'which are not of this fold.' Some would hold that the innermost voice of conscience is 'the essential Christ,' and that he who obeys

it is a true follower of the Saviour. But the Bible offers us no guidance in this region.

Foreign missionaries in our day have found among the heathen select natures, solitary souls, who were not far from the kingdom, who had been struggling Christwards for years, and who at once eagerly embraced Him when offered to them. I can testify that such cases are often found in the most unpromising corners of our home heathenism. When Brainerd went to the Indians he found among them a man who seemed to be almost a Christian. He said that he was once like the rest of the Indians, but that his heart had been changed. He had been in great distress, but 'God had comforted his heart,' he said, 'and showed him what he should do, and since that time he had known God, and tried to serve Him, and loved all men, be they who they would.' He earnestly besought the people of his tribe not to drink intoxicants, and when he failed, he would burst into tears.

Another missionary discovered a devout woman in the wilds of Central Africa. For long she had been praying to some unknown one, and when told of Christ, exclaimed, 'Oh, that is He, the same that I have found in my prayers, and now have always with me.'¹

A very interesting case of the same kind is described at the close of Moffat's *Missionary Labours and Scenes in South Africa*. Such facts permit us to believe—

That feeble hands and helpless,
Groping blindly in the darkness,
Touch God's right hand in that darkness,
And are lifted up and strengthened.

If the views here offered correctly represent the doctrine and spirit of the Bible, they certainly encourage mission effort and hopefulness. No one can reasonably imagine that the most hopeful interpretation of the Bible hints about the heathen makes mission effort unnecessary. The most suggestive of these hints cluster round Cornelius; no other

¹ Bushnell's *Nature and the Supernatural*, pp. 307, 308.

outside of the visible Church is more commended than he is, and yet heaven and earth are moved to bring the Gospel to him.

The Christian student should be thankful that the comparative study of religions has become so popular. It fixes attention upon the grandest of all themes, and it offers us a vantage-ground whence we can best survey the immeasurable superiority of the Christian faith. It can only do us good to make ourselves better acquainted with the very best that the sages have said and done. As we witness their struggles after the light, our warmest sympathies must go forth to them. While we notice their failures, we are delighted to find that they held many truths which we also hold, and we thus grow more hopeful regarding the enlightenment of the heathen. This study may also be recommended as a remedy for weak convictions and the modern passion for concessions. When we place Christ and the sages side by side we shall feel more than ever that the Christian thinker is not required to make concessions, for by the aid of the law of contrast we shall gain the fullest persuasion of the peerless excellences of Christ as the Light and Life of men.

THE END.

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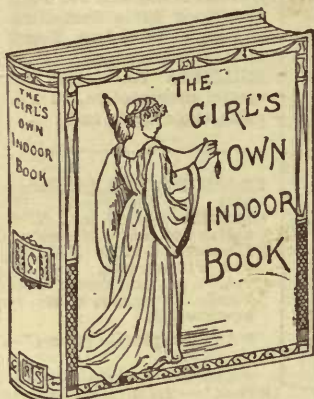
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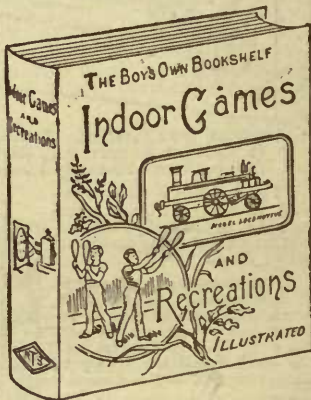
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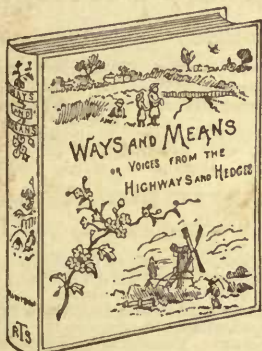


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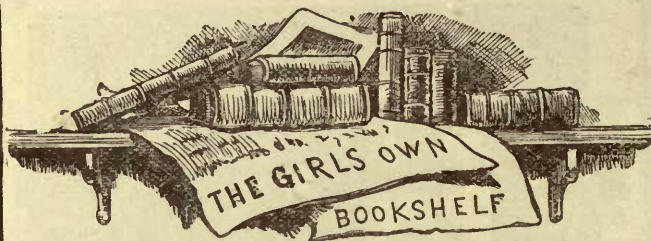
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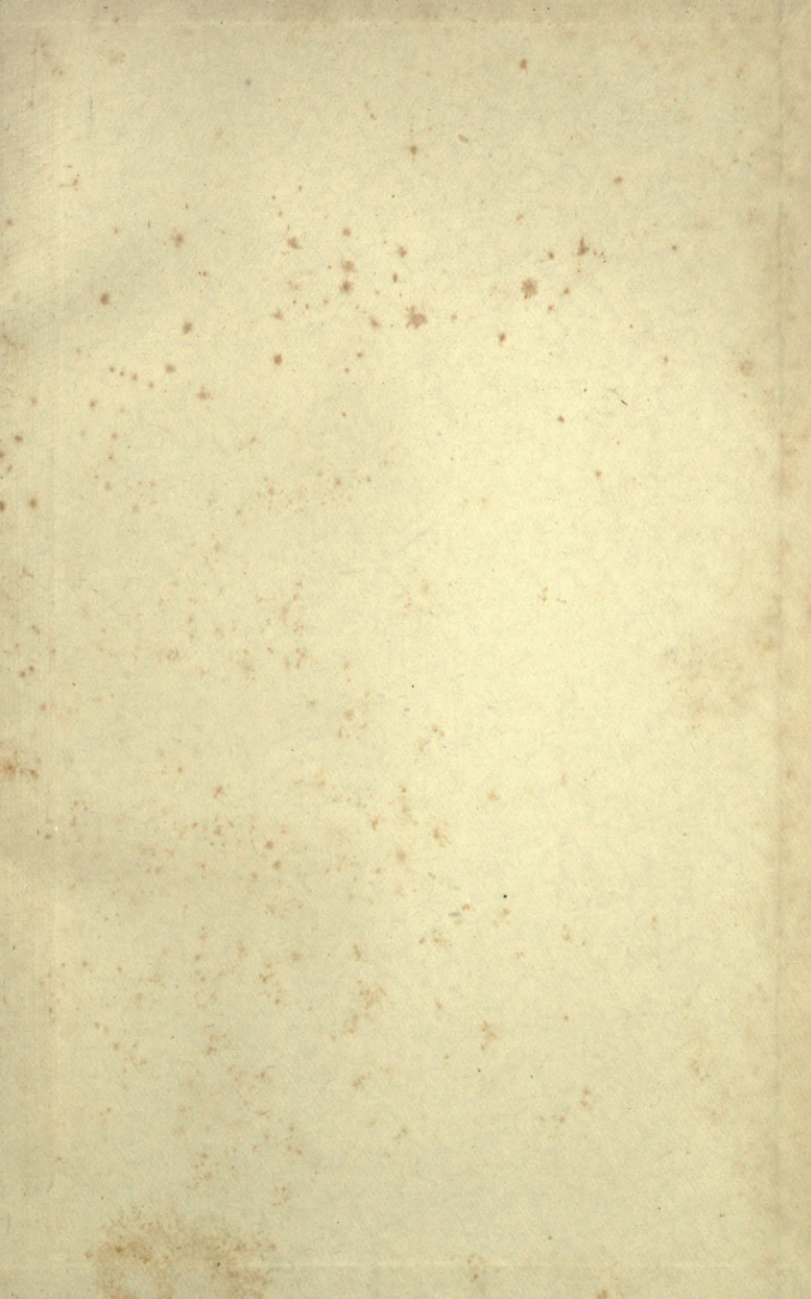
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